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MARVEL PREVIEW

PARADOX

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STAN LEE presents:

MARVELPREVIEW

featuring

PARADOX

By BILL MANTLO & VAL MAYERIK
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THE UNIVERSAL CORNUCOPIA
or
What Parallel Universes Mean to Me

Time,(we were taught as children) is a river, flowing inexorably from past to future. Just as one could not reverse the flow of a river, so time could not be made to flow from present, say, to past, nor could one skip a mile or so into the future. No, we were all, they said, man and beast and the very earth and planets, simply bobing along in a perpetual *now* toward an ineluctable *tomorrow.*

Our teachers were wrong.

Einstein, among others, made that peaceful time-stream an anachronism, and there is no turning back. Physicists now say that there is probably no reason why time travel cannot become a reality...in fact, they believe they've found a particle— the tachyon— that *normally* travels backwards in time! Some even posit the existence of a "tachyon universe," although what such a universe would be like is almost incomprehensible.

Moreover, there is actually no such thing as *time*— there is only space/time. Sticking with the time travel theme for a moment, imagine that you have cleverly built a real doggone time machine. You set your time machine for New York City in the year 1900 and throw the lever.....and die very quickly as your time machine pops you into outer space. For the earth, the solar system, the galaxies, *everything* is continually moving. To avoid problems you must have a space/time machine that will take you not only *when* you want to go, but will be able to compute exactly where the entire celestial pattern is at the time in which you wish to arrive.

Let's make life tougher by bringing up what has become a respectable part of the new physics, the Multiple Universe Theory. This "simply" states that everything that might have happened, *does* happen. The beginning of everything— if there ever was anything that might be called a beginning— might be pictured as the trunk of a tree. From this tree branches grow, and branches off the branches, on into infinity. To be mundane about it, in this universe I got up and came to work. But there's another in which I played hooky, another in which that truck that almost nailed me on Lexington Avenue *did*, and so on. All these things happened in parallel universes. (There may also be universes so different from "ours" that we can't imagine them.)

Reality, as you see isn't what it used to be.

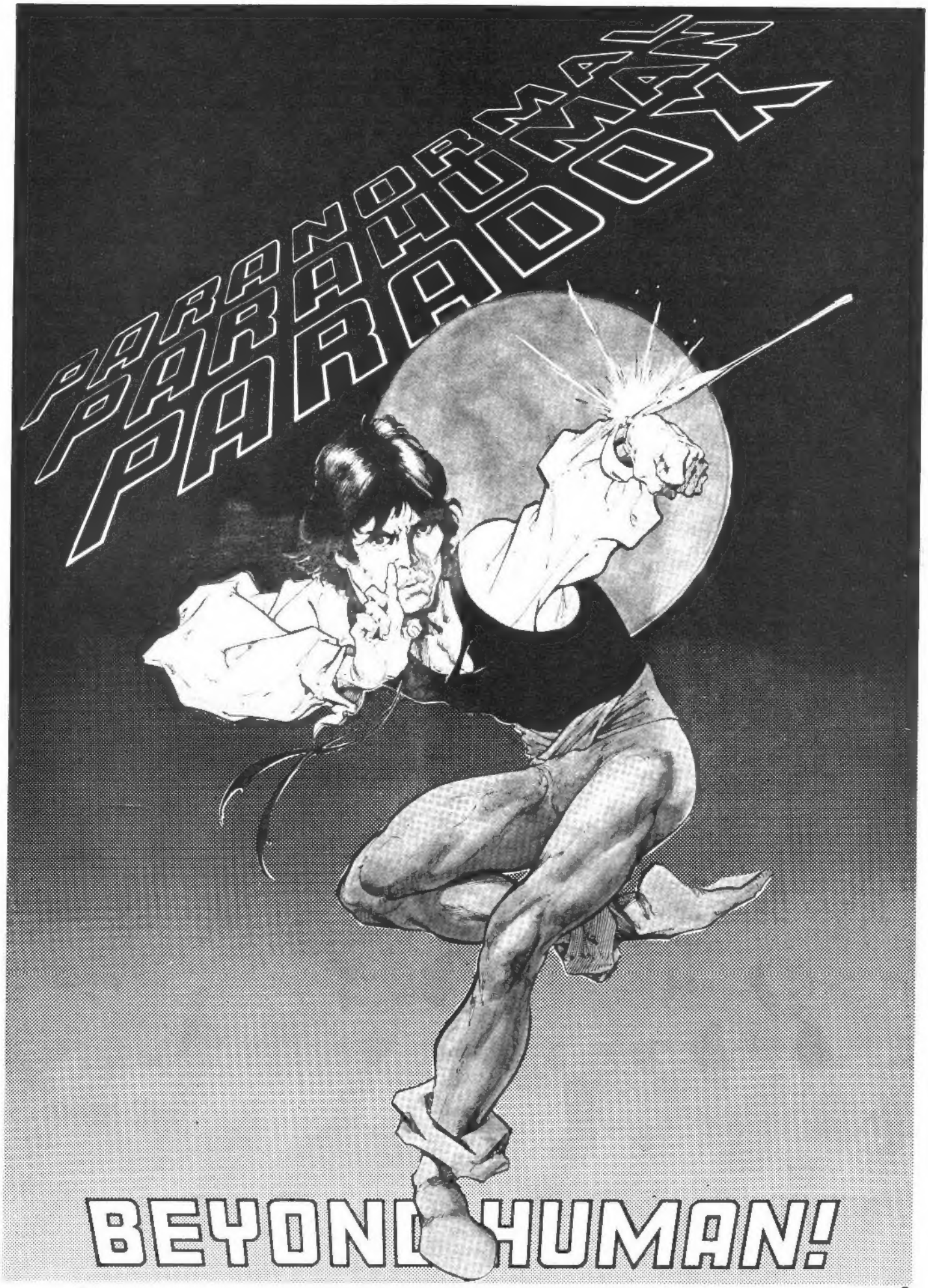
MARVEL PREVIEW is also not what it used to be. Although in the past there have been many fine stories printed in this magazine, the kind of stories we print in the future will be different. We will be exploring the extraordinary, the bizarre, and the mind-expanding— all shaped around characters you will love or hate, drawn by the finest artists working in the comic art field. (If you've been reading *Sneak Preview*, you know who they are.)

In *this* universe Marvel will be bringing you stories of exceptional entertainment value and unusual depth.

It's going to be a *great* trip!

LYNN

MARVEL PREVIEW has been increasing in popularity so rapidly that we are now using a better grade of paper. We are also changing the title of this book (although the contents will remain the same) to BIZARRE ADVENTURES. More details in next issue's SNEAK PREVIEW.


PARAHUMAN PARADOX
BEYOND HUMAN!

TWO HUNDRED YEARS IN THE FUTURE

Excerpt from Howe's ***"A Concise History of the Terran Empire"***

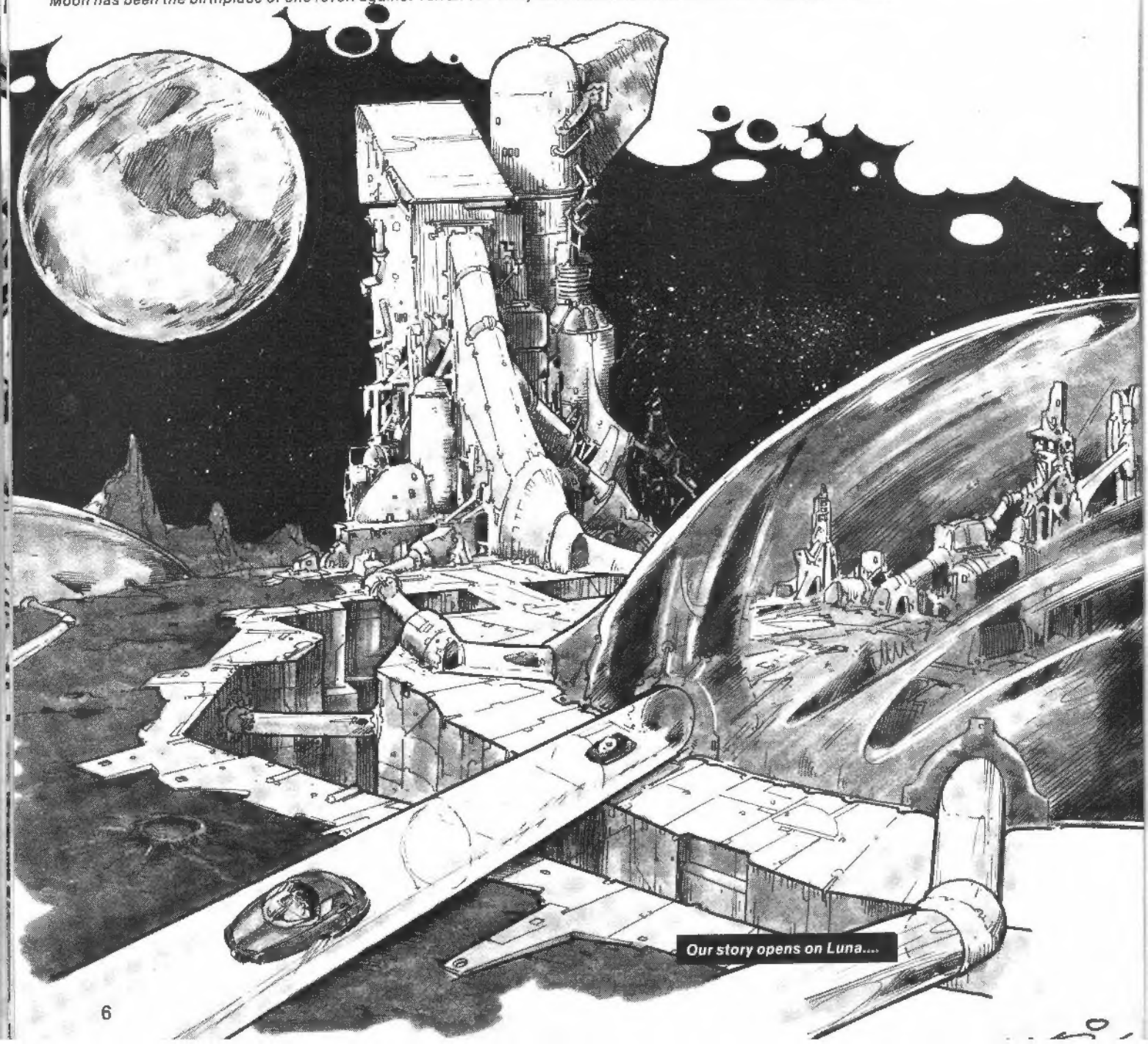
Edition of 2181 -- Banned by Order of the Imperial Censor

By the middle of the Twenty-first Century ***Terra*** *(archaic designation,* ***Earth****) had extended her dominion over her eight sister planets and their satellites in the star-system Sol. Tremendous advances in the biological sciences led to the genetic engineering (gengineering) of humanform Terrans to allow them to survive under the varying conditions prevalent on the different planets. To her colonies, Terra exported all her industry, pollution, crime, and poverty, leaving Terra herself an agricultural paradise in control of the Empire's food resources. Terra, then, is a world of fertile fields and shining cities, the governmental, financial, and cultural hub of the Empire. It is inhabited by descendants of the original humanforms with whom all races of the Empire claim a common heritage, and the Terrans consider themselves the only "pure" race, and Terran law clearly distinguishes between the rights of "humans" and gengineered Servant Species.*

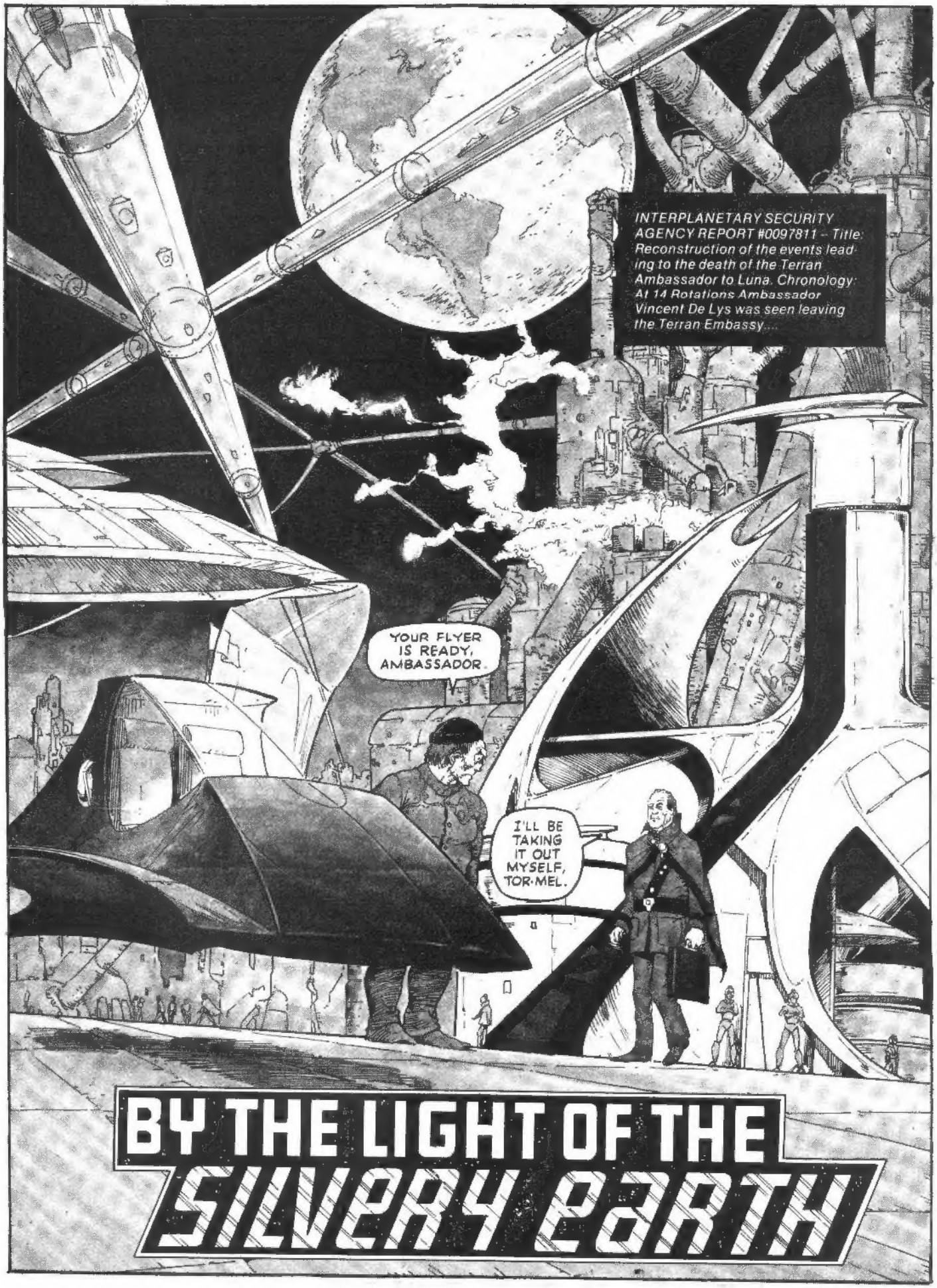
These Servant Species are the Saturnians -- tall and reedy, with strange finlike crests on their appendages, Mercurians who glow white-hot and wear heat suits to keep their temperatures up in the thousands of degrees centigrade, Jovians whose massive nostrils filter oxygen from among the abrasive gases of Jupiter, Pluvians who are blue-skinned and swathed in fur, Martians who wear water-circulating all-concealing robes to protect them against their world's dust storms, and Neptunians, about whom the Terrans laughingly say the less known, the better.

Then there are the Lunans.

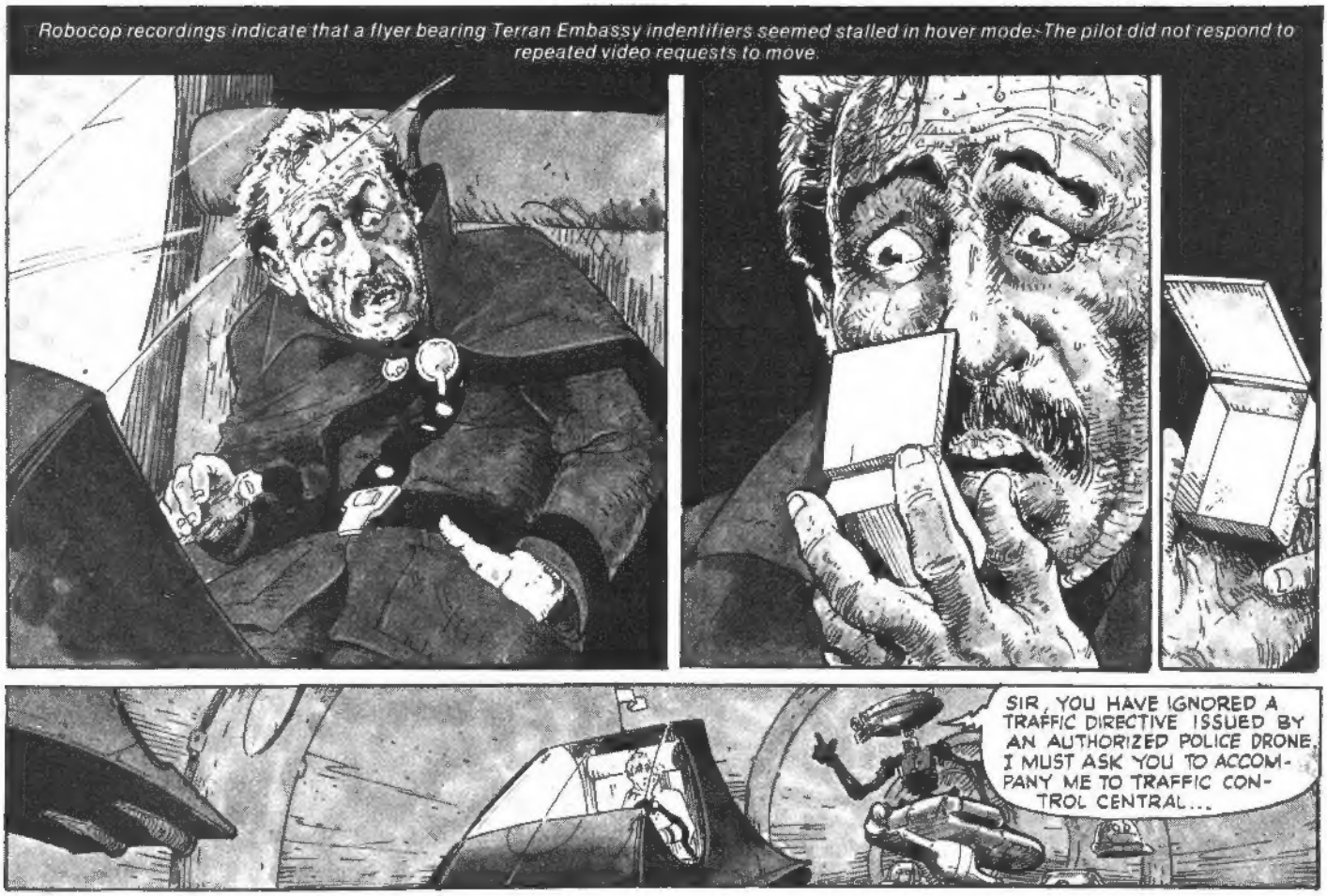
The Moon -- Terra's original and oldest colony -- is a godforsaken mining world, raped for its mineral wealth. Its terrain, considered unworthy of Terraforming, has been left harsh and forbidding. Its squat grey cities are enclosed within dirty double domes environmentally maintained by huge atmosphere banks. Transparent tubeways connect Luna's domes, and huge rampways lead down their many levels to the ore mines that honeycomb the satellite. On these levels, law has been suspended. No Terran dares descend down into the depths. Crime and poverty rage side by side. The outmoded concepts ***"survival of the fittest"*** *remains the operative principle. The Lunans themselves, the first Terrans to be gengineered, are short, squat, and heavily-muscled, primarily bred for work in Luna's mines. Orbiting in Earth's shadow, the Moon has been the birthplace of one revolt against Terran authority after another, all subverted or savagely put down.*



Our story opens on Luna....

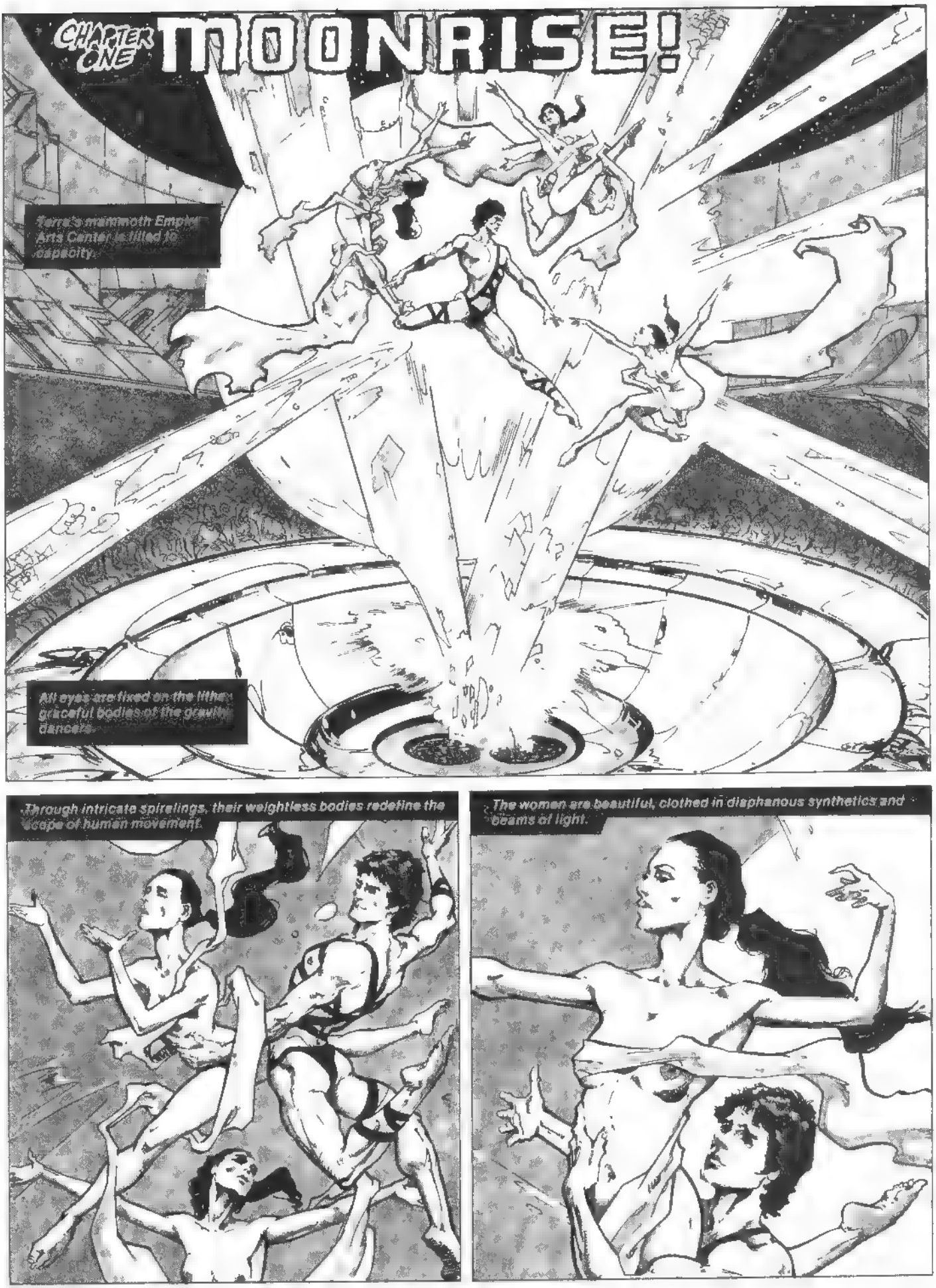

INTERPLANETARY SECURITY AGENCY REPORT #0097811 – Title: Reconstruction of the events leading to the death of the Terran Ambassador to Luna. Chronology: At 14 Rotations Ambassador Vincent De Lys was seen leaving the Terran Embassy...
YOUR FLYER IS READY, AMBASSADOR.
I'LL BE TAKING IT OUT MYSELF, TOR·MEL.
BY THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY EARTH

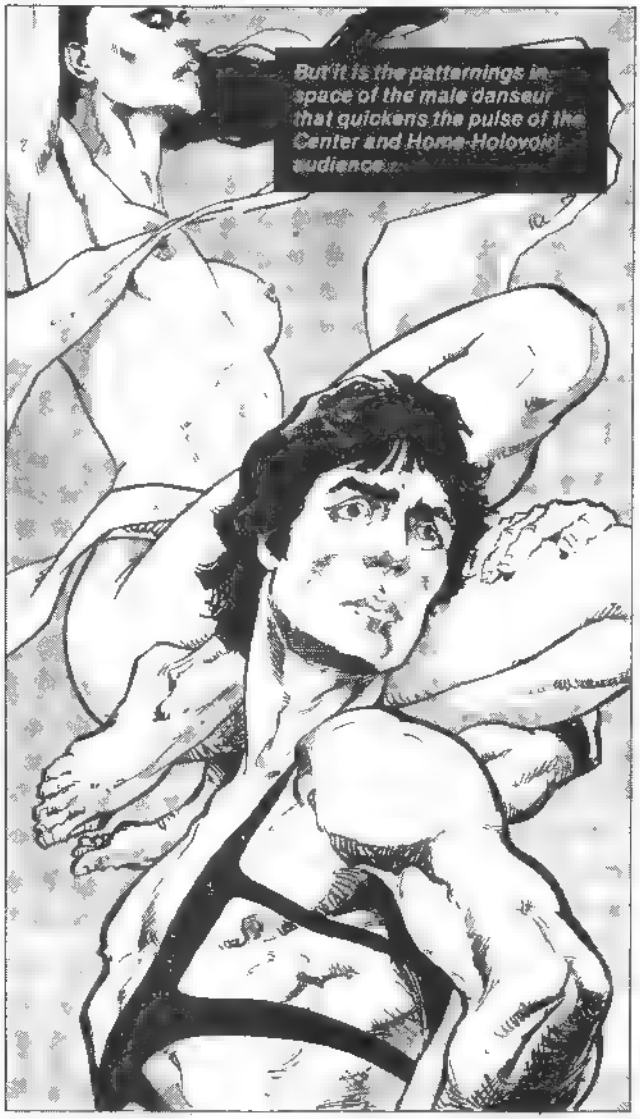
The Ambassador's Lunan chauffeur says he was not surprised.
The Ambassador often went off alone.
But the witness did say that the Ambassador appeared troubled.
YOU ARE TREMBLING, SIR. ARE YOU SICK?
PERHAPS I SHOULD PILOT YOU HOME?
HOME?
YES, SIR. ALLOW ME TO VIDEO YOUR WIFE AND TELL HER TO EXPECT YOU.
MY WIFE?
DON'T BOTHER. SHE KNOWS WHERE I'M GOING.
SNIK
SHE SENT ME THERE.
Witness claims that was the last time he saw the deceased.
The Ambassador's flyer was next reported seen approaching the Main Access Tube leading to Mare Imbrium Dome.
PLEASE KEEP MOVING. REMAIN IN FLIGHT LANES.

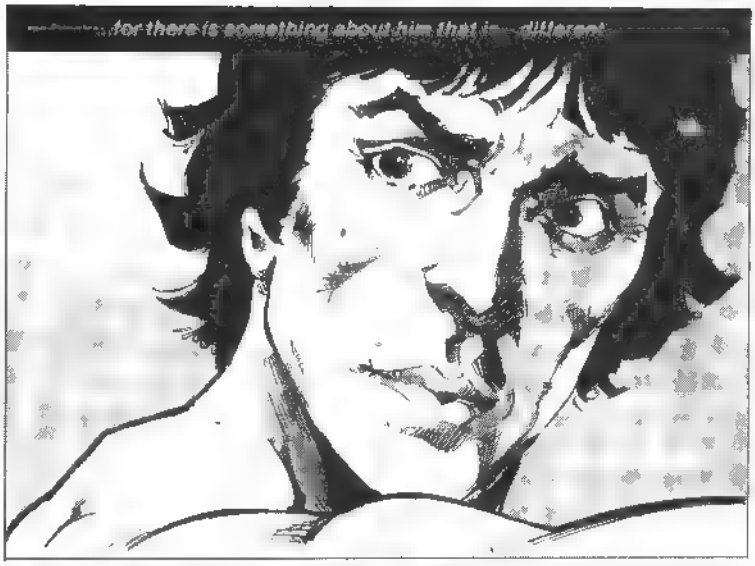

Robocop recordings indicate that a flyer bearing Terran Embassy indentifiers seemed stalled in hover mode. The pilot did not respond to repeated video requests to move.
SIR, YOU HAVE IGNORED A TRAFFIC DIRECTIVE ISSUED BY AN AUTHORIZED POLICE DRONE. I MUST ASK YOU TO ACCOMPANY ME TO TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTRAL...
SQUEE
GET OUT OF MY WAY!
The termination signal from the police drone alerted Traffic Control Central. A Robocop pursuit squad vectored in on the Ambassador's flyer and gave chase.
OVERRIDE FLYER CONTROLS.

NEGATIVE RESPONSE. VEHICLE EQUIPPED WITH DIPLOMATIC SECURITY SCRAMBLERS.
The Ambassador's flyer moved erratically through the Main Access Tube.
IT--IT'S BEGINNING!
CATHERINE...
Those were the last recorded words on the Ambassador's dictabelt. Out of control, his flyer punched a hole in the Main Access Tube.
ALERT! ALERT!
EVACUATE HUMANS! GRAVITY AND ATMOSPHERE SYSTEMS BREACHED! EVACUATE HUMANS!
There was not, however, sufficient time to respond to his directive.

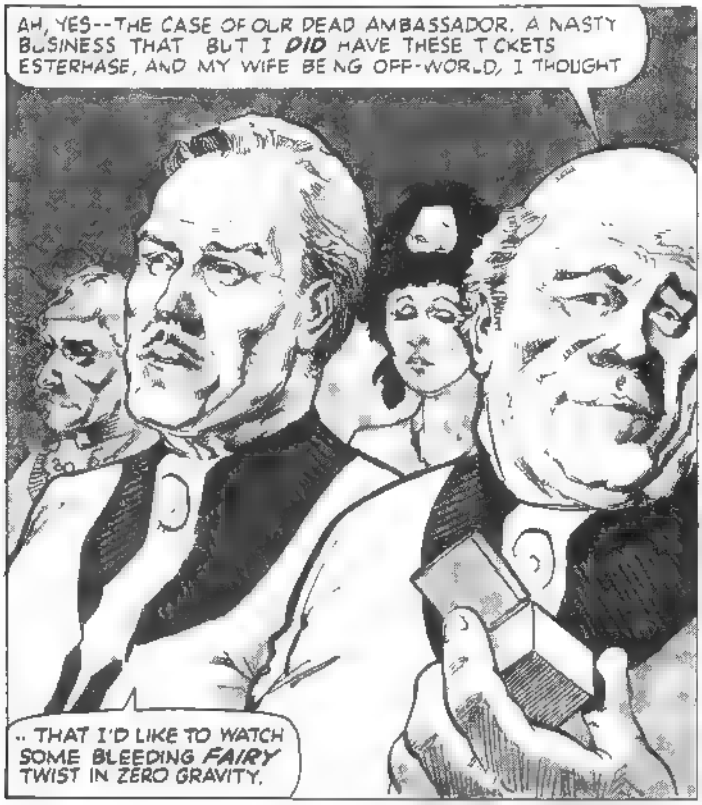
By 15 Rotations, hospital and repair crews were at work on the scene of what the media were already calling the worst traffic disaster in Lunan history.
Alerted that the Terran Ambassador flyer was discovered amidst the wreckage a security cordon was erected on the area by the Interplanetary Security Agency.
ISA Bureau Chief Esterhause supervised the investigation personally.
JESUS.
THIS IS GOING TO CAUSE ONE HELL OF A FUROR--A TERRAN AMBASSADOR DYING IN A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT ON LUNA.
IT WAS AN ACCIDENT. THERE'S NO OXYGEN OUT HERE TO SUPPORT COMBUSTION BUT THE CORPSE IS COMPLETELY CHARRED.
IT LOOKS AS IF HE BURNED FROM THE INSIDE OUT.
BLUE TINGE TO THE SKELETON TRACES OF PYROPHENAL 2 AND GELGINITE IN PRELIMINARY CELL SAMPLES.
CHIEF, I THINK I'VE FOUND WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR!
ASBESTOSCASE.' THAT CLINCHES IT.' NO QUESTION BUT THAT OUR DIPLOMATIC CORPSE WAS HOOKED ON ITS CONTENTS
F REFLITE
BOOK ME ON THE FIRST SHUTTLE TO TERRA
End Interplanetary Security Agency Report #0007811. Classification: Top Secret.


CHAPTER ONE
MOONRISE!
Terra's mammoth Empire Arts Center is filled to capacity.
All eyes are fixed on the lithe, graceful bodies of the stealth dancers.
Through intricate spirelings, their weightless bodies redefine the scope of human movement.
The women are beautiful, clothed in diaphanous synthetics and beams of light.


But it is the patternings in space of the male danseur that quickens the pulse of the Center and Home-Holovoid audience...


...for there is something about him that is... different

I CAME TO TERRA FOR HELP, STANHOPE-- FOR AN AGENT UNKNOWN ON LUNA--NOT TO SIT THROUGH SOME BORING BALLET!


AH, YES--THE CASE OF OUR DEAD AMBASSADOR. A NASTY BUSINESS THAT. BUT I DID HAVE THESE TICKETS ESTERHASE, AND MY WIFE BEING OFF-WORLD, I THOUGHT
.. THAT I'D LIKE TO WATCH SOME BLEEDING FAIRY TWIST IN ZERO GRAVITY.

DON'T BE SO PROVINCIAL ESTERHASE. YOU'LL COME TO LIKE THE LAD ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW HIM
HE'S YOUR NEW AGENT, YOU SEE. COME BACKSTAGE AND I'LL INTRODUCE YOU

Aboard the shuttle, Esterhase briefs Paradox on the death of the Terran Ambassador to Luna.
A BLOODY MESS, LITERALLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY SO FAR WE'VE HELD OFF THE NEWSIES WITH THE STORY THAT HE SUFFERED A HEART ATTACK..
BUT THE AMBASSADOR HAD NO HISTORY OF HEART TROUBLE SO WHY DID HE CARRY THIS PILLBOX?
I.S.A. LUNA THINKS IT HAS THE ANSWER TO THAT
BUT FIRST, LET ME SHOW YOU THIS HOLOVOID.
Subject Vincent De Lys late Terran Ambassador to Luna
Nearly at retirement age after a long and distinguished career in the diplomatic service
His mission At the behest of the Emperor, to resolve long standing differences between full Terrans and gengineered Lunan colonials
A widower when he arrived on Luna Ambassador De Lys soon met and married Catherine Worth
SHE IS THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF A WEALTHY TERRAN FAMILY WHOSE MINING INTEREST KEEPS THEM ON LUNA. SHE SEEMED TO PUT SOME NEW LIFE INTO THE OLD BOY. BUT LET'S MOVE ON...

Backstage is, in reality, a landing pad below the huge amphitheater. The dancers float out of the antigravity field in which they performed to resume their normal weight.
DON'T LET THIS UPSET YOU, ESTERHASE--IT MAKES FOR A GREAT COVER.
HRRMPH!
PARADOX--YOU WERE WONDERFUL!
SIMPLY DIVINE!
THE CROWD IS GIVING YOU A STANDING OVATION!
PARADOX?
HIS STAGE--AND INTERPLANETARY SECURITY AGENCY--NAME OLD MAN. PARADOX, I'M ASSIGNING YOU TO LUNA BUREAU CHIEF ESTERHASE HERE.
A MISSION?
THANK YOU, SIR!
DISGUSTING! I NEED A GOOD MAN FOR THIS JOB NOT A
EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT YOU MUST BE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE--TROUBLE NO ORDINARY AGENT CAN GET YOU OUT OF--OR THE I.S.A. WOULDN'T DREAM OF USING ME
NOW LET'S GET DOWN TO THE TAWDRY DETAILS OF MY MISSION, SHALL WE?
Less than an hour later, an IOA shuttle leaves Terra for the moon.

FOLLOWING THE WEDDING DeLYS SETTLED INTO EMBASSY ROUTINE, MAKING CONTACTS WITH PROMINENT TERRANS ON LUNA AT THE MANY PARTIES ARRANGED BY HIS VIVACIOUS YOUNG BRIDE THAT'S WHEN EMBASSY INTELLIGENCE REPORTS HE FIRST MET..
Subject. Sebastian Seasons--interplanetary spice smuggler, unindicted. Suspected of also trafficking in narcotics
SEASONS' MONEY MAKES HIM SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE DESPITE ISAS FLE ON HIM, SO IT WASN'T TOO UNREASONABLE THAT HE'D SHOW UP AT AN EMBASSY SHINDIG
WE PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT TOO MUCH OF IT, IF A FEW MONTHS LATER EMBASSY ROBOPOLICE HADN'T CAUGHT AN AIDE PASSING OFFICIAL SECRETS.
WE QUESTIONED HIM. STANDARD INTERROGATION. PROMISED HIM IMMUNITY IF HE'D REVEAL HIS CONTACTS
WHEN SUDDENLY HE BEGAN TO..SMOKE.
SMALL STUFF, BUT STILL A TREASONABLE OFFENSE.
HE SEEMED TERRIFIED OF SOMETHING. SHOOK LIKE A LEAF--
"WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS OUR FIRST EXPOSURE TO THE HELLISH EFFECTS OF FIREFLITE!"

FIREFLITE!

There he finds another clue into the Holovoid.

Fireflite: First synthesized from pyrophenol-2 and gelignite in the high-temperature laboratories on Mercury

MY, WE HAVE GOT A PROBLEM, HAVEN'T WE?

Bureau Chief Este[illegible] base again inwardly curses ISA Central for assigning h[illegible] Paradox.

Smuggled off-world --

--it soon spread upward from the Servant Species to become a "thrill drug" used by full-Terrans

TRI-SEX

Hidden Holovoid cameras recorded this Addictium party at the Terran community on Luna

Two guests were offered the Fireflite cubes

A third stood between them with the antidote capsules

What ensued was analagous to the ancient Terran game of "chicken" As the Fireflite reacted in their bloodstream

--the woman was the first to 'chicken out'

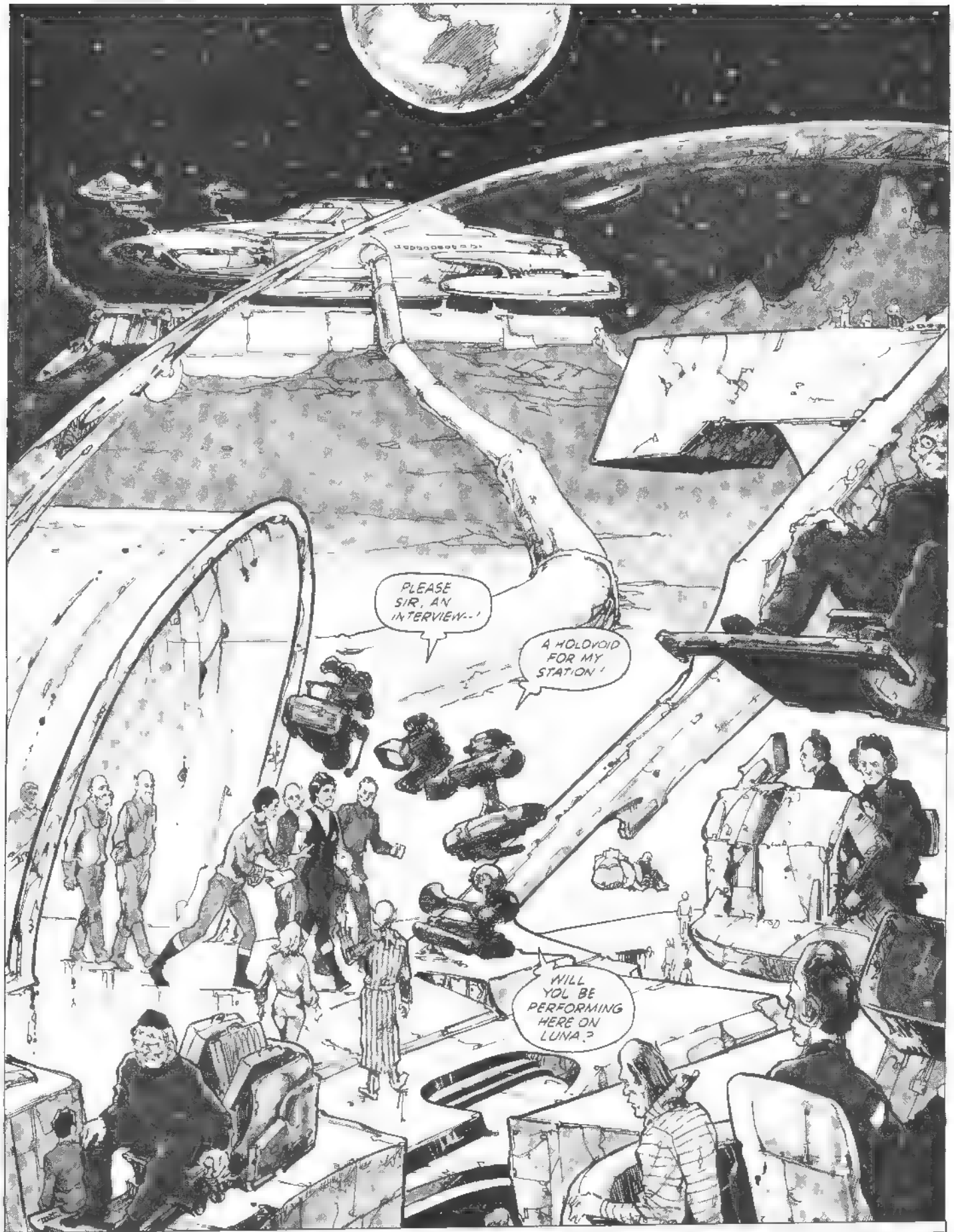
She swallowed the antidote capsule in time

AND HER COMPANION?

In the jargon of the game, he 'went 'ferno', exploding into flames from within

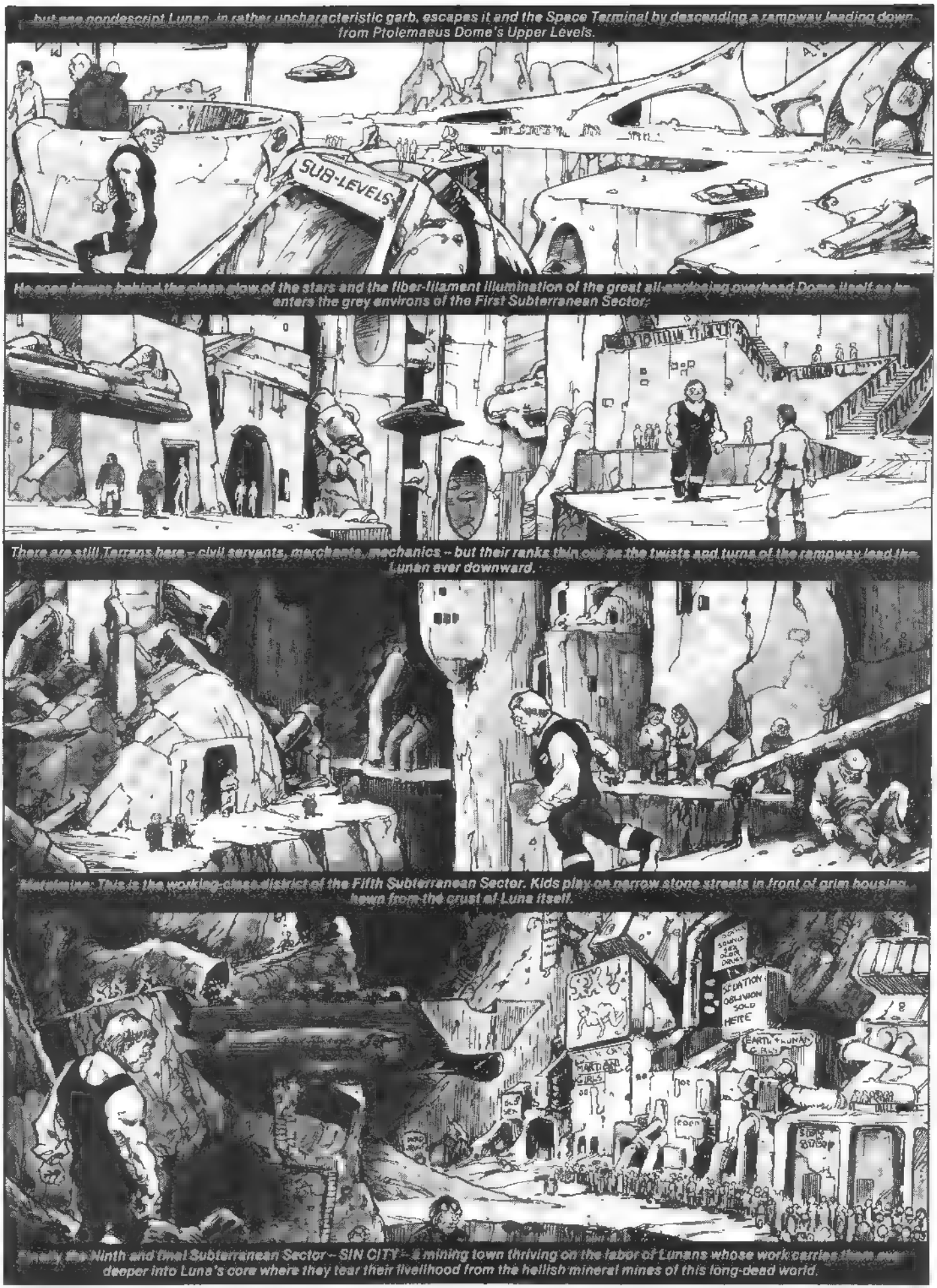
Huge sums were bet on the outcome

YOU CAN SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CASE THEN? MISSING EMBASSY SECRETS. DIPLOMATIC STAFF FOUND TO HAVE FATAL FIREFLITE HABITS AND THEN THE AMBASSADOR HIMSELF GOING INFERNO..
YOU SEEM TO BE HAVING A HOT TIME UP ON THE OLD COLD MOON THESE DAYS
BLAST IT, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A SCANDAL THAT COULD SET BACK TERRA-LUNAN RELATIONSHIPS FOR A DECADE! WE'VE GOT TO DISCOVER WHO WAS SUPPLYING THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS STAFF WITH FIREFLITE--
--BECAUSE THE SAME PUSHER OBVIOUSLY UPPED THE PRICE FOR THE FIREFLITE ANTIDOTE FROM MONEY TO EMBASSY INFORMATION!
MY THEORY IS THAT THE AMBASSADOR, NURTURING A SECRET ADDICTION, BALKED AT BETRAYING TERRA AND CHOSE THE ONLY HONORABLE WAY OUT OF HIS DILEMMA HE REFUSED TO COOPERATE IN EXCHANGE FOR THE ANTIDOTE AND ALLOWED HIMSELF TO GO 'FERNO.
THIS IS THE KIND OF MISSION MY SON--AN INTERPLANETARY SECURITY AGENT HIMSELF--MIGHT HAVE HANDLED IF HE HADN'T BEEN SLAIN DURING A RAID ON AN OFF-WORLD SMUGGLING OPERATION.
WELL, WHAT'S BEEN DONE CAN'T BE UNDONE. I ONLY HOPE YOU PROVE TO BE HALF THE AGENT MY BOY WAS--*PARADOX*!!
OH, SORRY, SIR. YOU WERE SAYING...?



CHAPTER TWO NOW YOU SEE HIM, NOW YOU *DON'T!*

OH, YES-- YOU'LL GET TO SEE ME IN ACTION
YOU IDIOT--GET AWAY FROM THOSE CAMERAS! ARE YOU TRYING TO BLOW YOUR COVER?
WHY ARE YOU BEING ACCOMPANIED BY AN I.S.A BUREAU CHIEF SIR?
I GUESS THE I.S.A DECIDED THAT AN ARTIST OF MY STATURE NEEDED PERSONAL PROTECTION.
PARADOX, WHERE ARE YOU GO--!
BUT I'VE LEARNED IN MY TRAVELS TO EVERY OUTPOST OF THE EMPIRE THAT THE BEST PROTECTION ANY ENTERTAINER CAN HAVE IS THE LOVE OF HIS FANS
PARADOX!
I'VE LOST SIGHT OF HIM IN THE CROWD, SIR!
WHY SO HAVE I!
I.S.A
FIND HIM! HE'S NOT EXACTLY HARD TO RECOGNIZE!
I.S.A
I--I THINK I SAW HIM LAST OVER THAT WAY, SIR!
Contessa Reigns


but one nondescript Lunan, in rather uncharacteristic garb, escapes it and the Space Terminal by descending a rampway leading down from Ptolemaeus Dome's Upper Levels.
SUB-LEVELS
He soon leaves behind the clean glow of the stars and the fiber-filament illumination of the great all-enclosing overhead Dome itself as he enters the grey environs of the First Subterranean Sector.
There are still Terrans here -- civil servants, merchants, mechanics -- but their ranks thin out as the twists and turns of the rampway lead the Lunan ever downward.
Meanwhile: This is the working-class district of the Fifth Subterranean Sector. Kids play on narrow stone streets in front of grim housing hewn from the crust of Luna itself.
SEDATION OBLIVION SOLD HERE
EARTH + LUNAR
Finally, the Ninth and final Subterranean Sector -- SIN CITY -- a mining town thriving on the labor of Lunans whose work carries them ever deeper into Luna's core where they tear their livelihood from the hellish mineral mines of this long-dead world.

The most attractions of Sin City are as perverse as they are plentiful, and to them throng the scum of the Empire's worlds and moons — only at any price. The only Terrans here are those who have forgotten what it is to be human.

DEADLY ASH
CARL
YAZ TREMSK
HELLO, YAZ.
I DON'T RECALL BEIN' ON A FIRST NAME BASIS WITH NO LUNAN!
STATE YER BUSINESS -- OR GET OUT!
I GUESS THE BIONIC EYE THEY GAVE YOU AFTER YOU LOST YOUR OWN IN THAT DUEL ON BETELGEUSE ASTEROID--
--HASN'T IMPROVED YOUR SIGHT ANY, YAZ--
--OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT HAVE RECOGNIZED AN OLD FRIEND!
MARK, YOU SCURVY SON OF A SPACE DOG!
NOT MARK, CODE NAME: PARADOX GOT A PRIVA-SEAL? LUNAN WALLS HAVE MORE EARS THAN A SATURNIAN SPICESTALK
THIS WAY, THE PRIVA-SCREEN I DEVELOPED NEUTRALIZES ANY LISTENIN' DEVICE WITHIN FIFTY METERS.
BUT HOW IN SEVEN HELLS DID YA MAKE ME THINK YA LOOKED LUNAN? TELEPATHICS? YA PLAY WITH MY MIND?

NO, NOT TELEPATHICS, YAZ. THIS IS THE REAL THING
I'M A SHAPE-SHIFTER -- GENG.NEERED TO ALTER MY PHYSIOLOGY INTO THAT OF ANY RACE I PLEASE WHEREVER I PLEASE.. ALTHOUGH MY CONTROL GETS A LITTLE SLOPPY F I DON'T REST BETWEEN CHANGES.
SEE?
YA VE GONE FROM LUNAN TA TERRAN TA MERCURIAN TA ME AN' BACK N THE BLINK OF AN EYE ' CAN YA DO A NEPTUNIAN TOO ?
IF YOU'D LIKE
HEH-HEH NEVER MIND ' SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT ALONE ' BUT HOW IN THE- ?!
REMEMBER OUR DAYS AT THE I.S.A. ACADEMY, YAZ ? YOU WERE ONE HELL OF A WEAPONRY TEACHER-
-- BUT THERE WAS NOTHING IN YOUR LECTURES ABOUT WHAT AN AGENT SHOULD DO WHEN HE'S PINNED DOWN ON A LONELY ASTEROID BY A GANG OF SPICE SMUGGLERS.
'OH, MAYBE I COULD HAVE HELD THEM OFF UNTIL HELP ARRIVED--
-- F THE ASTEROID ITSELF HADN'T BEEN RADIOACTIVE, THAT IS!
BREEP! BREEP!
I KNOW THERE'S NO SOUND IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE, BUT I SWEAR I CAN STILL HEAR THE HIGH WHINE OF THE LASERBURST THAT TORE APART THE CLIFFSIDE BEHIND WHICH I'D SOUGHT SHELTER, BRINGING IT DOWN ON TOP OF ME!
VREET
AND I CAN STILL SEE THE LEERING FACE OF THE SMUGGLER I'D COME TO CAPTURE.
DO WE FRY HIM, BOSS?
CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S JUST A KID, OAF ?
WE'LL LEAVE HIM AND LET THIS RADIOACTIVE ROCK WE'RE ON BOIL HIS BLOOD!

"THE SMUGGLERS LEFT ME. I WAS NO LONGER CONSCIOUS WHEN THE ISA ROBORESCUE SQUAD FINALLY ARRIVED.

ISA

"MY DAD BEING A BIGSHOT IN THE ISA, THEY FIGURED THEY'D BETTER TAKE ME STRAIGHT TO ISA CENTRAL ON TERRA

"THERE, WITHOUT EVEN TELLING MY FAMILY THAT I WAS STILL ALIVE, THEY PLACED ME INSIDE AN ISOLATION CHAMBER AND GOT TO WORK, PICKING AND PROBING.

"YOU SEE, I'D SET A NEW RECORD FOR THE AMOUNT OF RADIATION A MAN CAN ABSORB AND STILL BE ALIVE.

"ISA CHIEF STANHOPE WAS CALLED IN AND INFORMED OF MY CONDITION."

IS THERE ANY HOPE OF SAVING THE BOY?

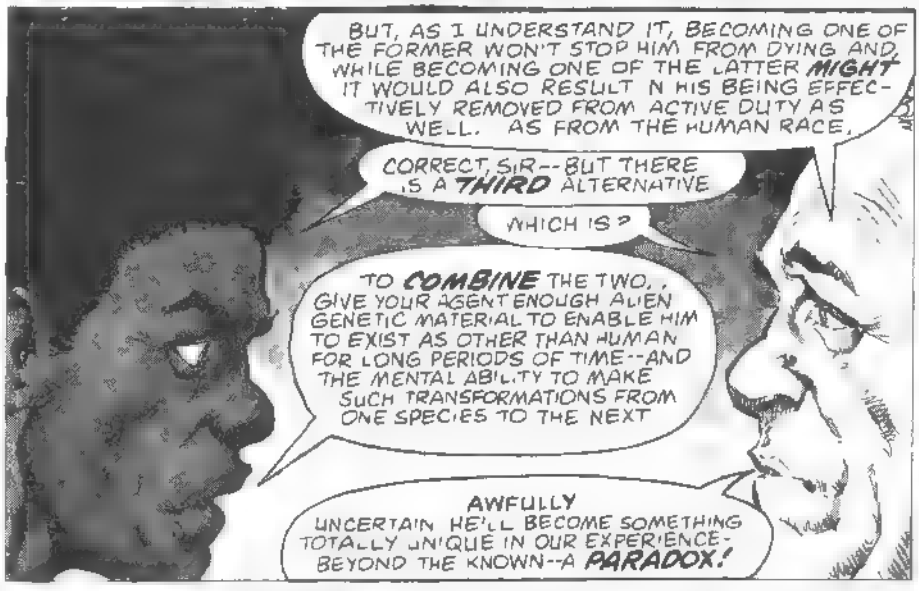
THE RADIATION HE ABSORBED IS DESTROYING ALL HUMAN CELLS AS QUICKLY AS WE TRY TO GRAFT THEM TO HIS SYSTEM -- TOTAL REJECTION. THE ONLY CHANCE, A LONG SHOT AT BEST, LIES IN GENGINEERING HIM INTO SOME RADIATION-TOLERANT SPECIES

YOU MEAN, MAKE HIM A MARTIAN OR SOME OTHER SERVANT SPECIES?

THOSE ARE THE BASIC PROVEN FORMS -- BUT NONE FITS THIS SITUATION

LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING. THESE ARE OUR PARANORMALS - BEYOND NORMAL PSYCHICS ESPERS, TELEPORTERS, -- ALL GENGNEERED HUMANS WHOSE POWERS OF MIND HAVE BEEN GENETICALLY ENHANCED.

IN THIS CHAMBER WE HAVE WHAT WE CALL OUR PARAHUMANS -- BEYOND HUMAN -- REMINDERS THAT EVEN IN THE RELATIVELY FOOLPROOF SCIENCE OF GENETIC ENGINEERING CERTAIN.. MISTAKES... CAN STILL OCCUR.
WE'RE HOPING TO ONE DAY DISCOVER WORLDS NOW UNKNOWN TO US SUITABLE FOR INHABITATION BY THESE POOR CREATURES.
GAD
I PRESUME YOU'RE SUGGESTING TURNING OUR BOY INTO EITHER A PARANORMAL OR A PARAHUMAN, DOCTOR--

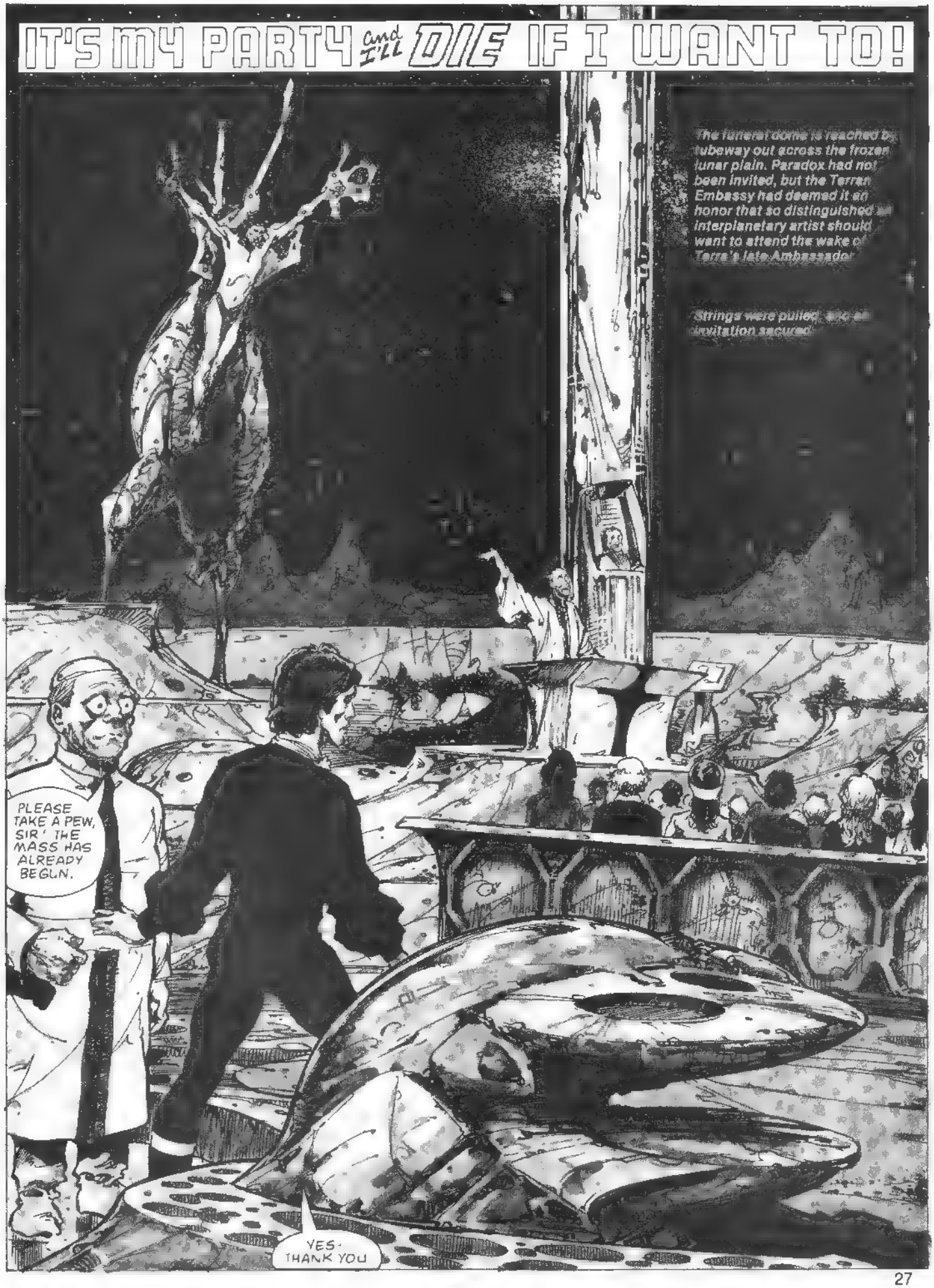

BUT, AS I UNDERSTAND IT, BECOMING ONE OF THE FORMER WON'T STOP HIM FROM DYING AND, WHILE BECOMING ONE OF THE LATTER MIGHT IT WOULD ALSO RESULT N HIS BEING EFFECTIVELY REMOVED FROM ACTIVE DUTY AS WELL. AS FROM THE HUMAN RACE.
CORRECT, SIR -- BUT THERE IS A THIRD ALTERNATIVE
WHICH IS?
TO COMBINE THE TWO, GIVE YOUR AGENT ENOUGH ALIEN GENETIC MATERIAL TO ENABLE HIM TO EXIST AS OTHER THAN HUMAN FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME -- AND THE MENTAL ABILITY TO MAKE SUCH TRANSFORMATIONS FROM ONE SPECIES TO THE NEXT
AWFULLY
UNCERTAIN HE'LL BECOME SOMETHING TOTALLY UNIQUE IN OUR EXPERIENCE - BEYOND THE KNOWN -- A PARADOX!

THEY DID IT SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY, I GUESS MY TERRAN FORM IS STILL RADIATION- POISONED - BUT I CAN STAVE OFF MY NEVITABLE DEATH BY BECOMING ANOTHER . FEFORM AS OFTEN AS I WISH.
YER DADDY KNOW ABOUT YOU?
HE THINKS I'M DEAD.
I'VE SLIGHTLY ALTERED EVEN MY TERRAN FORM AS A DISGUISE.

BUT I KNEW I COULD TRUST YOU, YAZ -- AND COUNT ON YOU FOR HELP. I'M ON A MISSION, AND I NEED A WEAPON.
GOT JUST THE THING FOR YA, BOY -- ONE OF YER OLD FAVORITES.

STRAP HER ON, LAD -- SEE HOW SHE HANDLES!
A WRISTLASER! THESE THINGS HAVE BEEN OUTLAWED THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE!

BUT THEY SING A SWEET SONG STILL, DON'T THEY?
VREEOW
AYE - THEY DO! NOW WHAT ELSE'LL YA BE NEEDIN'?
NFORMATION, YAZ.
AN' HOW'RE YA GOIN' TA GET IT, WITH EVERYONE ON LUNA RECOGNIZ'N' YER FAMOUS FACE?
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, YET YAZ? I CAN BE ANYONE.
I CAN EVEN BE YOU!
NO! STOP IT! I DON'T WANT TO BE REMINDED OF WHAT I WAS!
I-I'M SORRY I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE
T AIN'T YER FAULT BOYO-- IT'S THE ISA'S! THEY COULDA FIXED ME UP..
--BUT I'D BROKEN AN AGENCY LAW BY DUELIN, SO THEY LEFT ME TO ROT!
YOU'LL SEE HOW THEY ARE WHEN YA NEED 'EM MOST! YOU'LL SEE!
Musing on Yaz's warning, Paradox leaves the weaponsmith's to return to the Upper Levels. Many are the eyes that size up the graceful Terran -- among them those of a Mercurian prostitute.
She would like to show this young lady her skills...
...but she puts profit before pleasure, knowing that there are those who will pay handsomely for the information that the dapper has paid a visit to the weapon's shop of old Yaz Tremski.

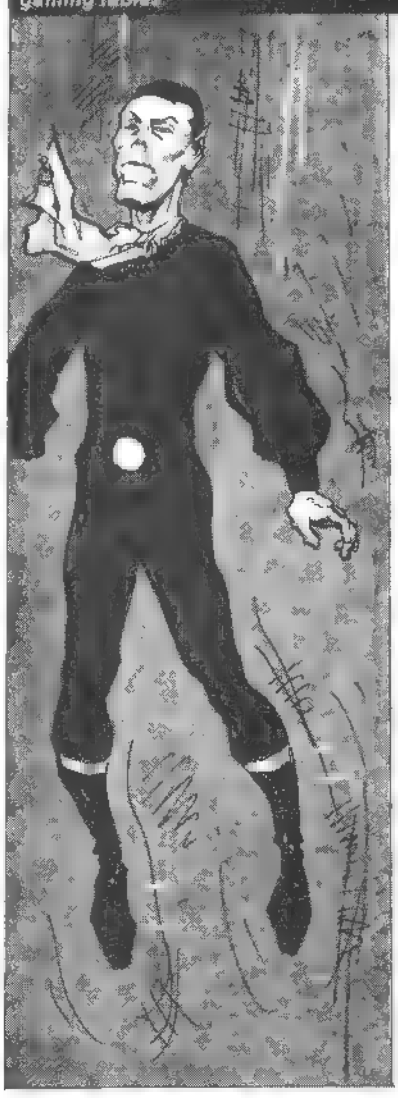

IT'S MY PARTY and I'LL DIE IF I WANT TO!
The funeral dome is reached by tubeway out across the frozen lunar plain. Paradox had not been invited, but the Terran Embassy had deemed it an honor that so distinguished an interplanetary artist should want to attend the wake of Terra's late Ambassador.
Strings were pulled, and an invitation secured.
PLEASE TAKE A PEW, SIR! THE MASS HAS ALREADY BEGUN.
YES- THANK YOU

... CHILDREN OF TERRA, WE ARE BROUGHT TOGETHER HERE TODAY, FAR FROM OUR ANCESTRAL HOME TO BID FAREWELL TO A MAN WHO SERVED HIS WORLD WITH HONOR AND INTEGRITY, NEVER ALLOWING PERSONAL PLEASURES TO INTERFERE WITH HIS CALL TO DUTY
THE AMBASSADOR'S WIFE!
Catherine De L. sits alone, an angel in widow's weeds. No one ever wore death so well.
She glances up at Parradox's arrival.
...and the electricity flows.
MAN IS A CHILD OF TERRA, AND TERRA WAS BORN OF THE ROILING STELLAR MATTER OF SPACE
THUS MAN CAN BE SAID TO BE A CHILD OF THE STARS--
- AND TO THE STARS SHALL MAN RETURN-
KLIK
SWOOSH
THE OLD MAN WILL REACH THE STARS BEFORE THE REST OF US--BUT HIS WIFE DOESN'T APPEAR PARTICULARLY GRIEF-STRICKEN.
The service over.

Paradox joins the mourners departing the funeral Dome.
MRS DELYS!
YES?
ALLOW ME TO EXPRESS MY CONDOLENCES ON BEHALF OF THE ENTIRE TERRAN ARTISTIC COMMUNITY YOUR HUSBAND WAS A GREAT PATRON OF THE DANCE.
MY HUSBAND HATED ART
IT WAS I WHO CONVINCED HIM TO MAKE CULTURAL ENDOWMENTS YOU ARE PARADOX -- THE ANTI-GRAV DANCER.
I
PERHAPS YOU'D LUNCH WITH ME, WHILE I ENDEAVOR TO PREVAIL UPON YOU TO PERFORM ON LUNA.
HAS MADAME FORGOTTEN HER PREVIOUS LUNCHEON APPOINTMENT?
OH! YES -- YES, OF COURSE!
FORGIVE ME BUT MY CHAUFFEUR IS CORRECT! WOMEN CAN BE SO FORGETFUL! BUT DO COME AND DANCE FOR ME SOME TIME BEFORE YOU LEAVE LUNA
IT WOULD BE BOTH AND HONOR AND A PLEASURE,
MOST DEFINITELY A PLEASURE.
- AND PLEASE -- CALL ME CATHERINE MRS. DELYS SOUNDS SO MORBID.
Seconds later, the flyer carrying the late Terran Ambassador's wife skims off towards a distant tubeway.
SO MUCH FOR MOURNING! STRANGE -- BUT FOR A SECOND THERE CATHERINE DELYS SEEMED TERRIFIED BY HER OWN LUNAR DRIVER!
SOMETHING SCARED HER HUSBAND SO THAT HE CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN DEAL FOR THE ANTIDOTE TO HIS ADDICTION. HAS THAT SAME SOMEONE GOT A HOLD ON THE AMBASSADOR'S WIFE, AS WELL?

In the perpetual night of Luna's dark side, an elegantly attired Venusian steps from a flyer before the illuminated entrance to Season's -- an interplanetarily renowned pleasure palace. A Terran maitre d'hotel -- a sign of fabulous wealth on a world where all servants are Lunan -- greets him. The Venusian says that he has heard of certain exotic entertainments to be enjoyed at Season's. Passing a credit check, he is led past the main level dining rooms to an antigrav lift hidden from the eyes of the club's mundane clientele.

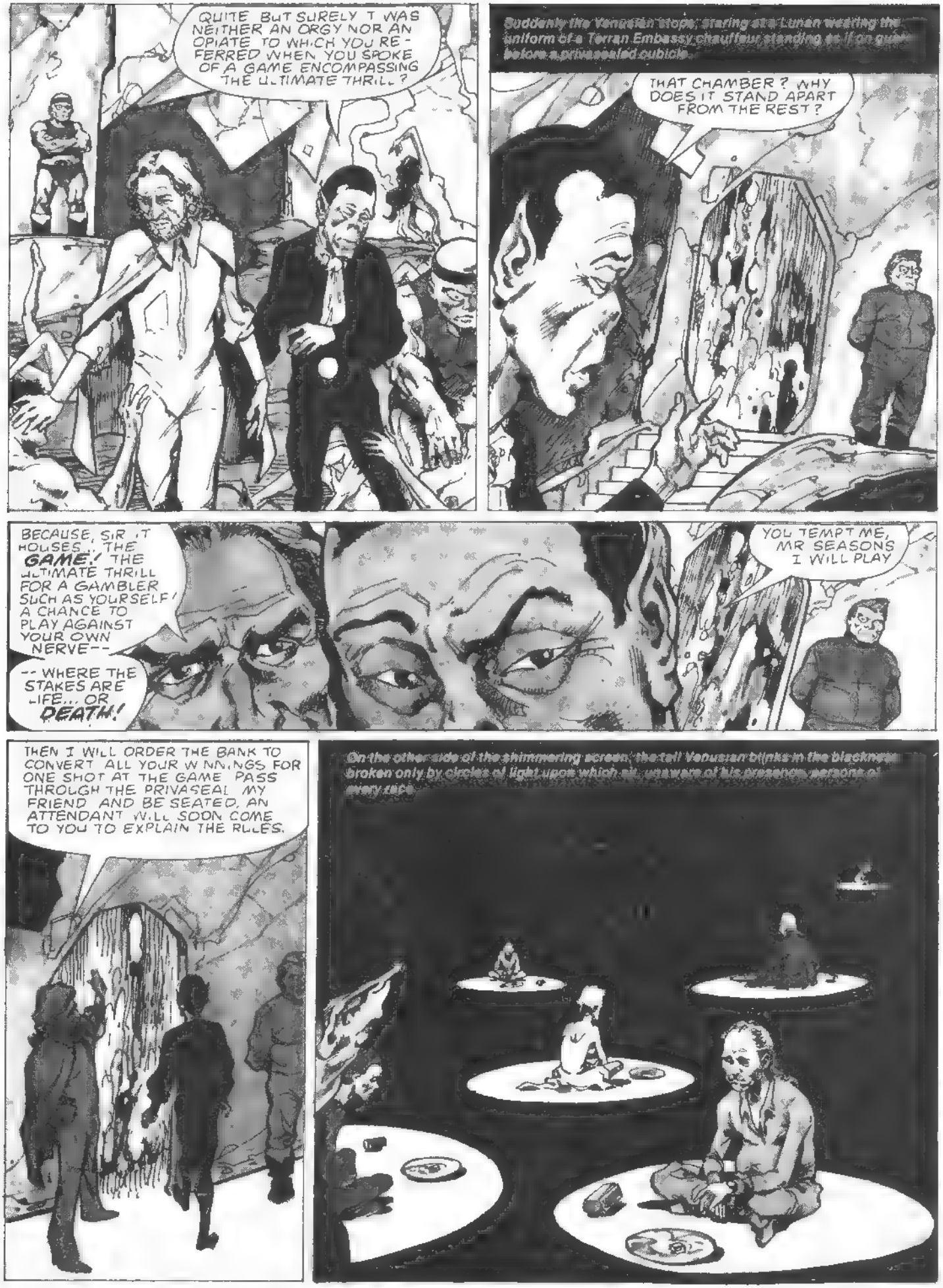
Stepping out into space, the Venusian loses all sense of weight as he is gently carried down in a wash of Matin's "Martian Concerto" into a world of wealth and wonderment. The hidden Casino does not discriminate, which is why it remains hidden from the eyes of those more orthodox Terrans who preach purity of the human race. Here gengineered representatives of every Colony gather to try their luck at the gaming tables.



The only things they share in common are the thrill they find in gambling, and the credits to back up their bets.

TEN THOUSAND GOLD ON RED 27
A murmur of astonishment spreads outward from the magneball table.
SUCH A LARGE BET, SIR? IF YOU LOSE.
THAT IS MY WORRY THERE IS NO THRILL WITH LOWER STAKES
LET ME SHARE YOUR LUCK, HANDSOME.
THE BALL IS IN THE MAGNE-FIELD! PLACE YOUR BETS, LADIES AND GENTLE-MEN
Around and around the shimmering energy ball goes, until the shifting magnetic polarities of the table stop it at...
RED 27 WINS!
YOUR CHIPS, S R
LEAVE THEM SPIN THE WHEEL AGAIN.
B-BUT THAT'S OVER ONE MILLION CREDITS!
IT IS NOT THE MONEY THAT IS IMPORTANT, MY DEAR, BUT THE THRILL OF BETTING ALL ONE POSSESSES AGAINST THE VAGARIES OF FICKLE FATE.
MR SEASONS, IT LOOKS AS IF WE HAVE A PRIME CUSTOMER.
I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.
With the Venusian's fifth consecutive win, the crowd around the magneball table becomes a mob. One would have to be extremely ingenious to make it through the press of bodies... or extremely important.
I AM SEBASTIAN SEASONS, OWNER OF THIS ESTABLISH-MENT.
HAVE I BROKEN THE BANK SO SOON, THEN?
HARDLY BUT I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU MIGHT BE LOOKING FOR A GAME WITH MORE DRAMATIC POSSIBILITIES. ONE PLAYED FOR HIGHER STAKES
I AM

I THOUGHT I KNEW EVERY GAMBLER IN THE EMPIRE. HOW IS IT I HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED YOU BEFORE?
YOU HAVE BUT MY LUCK WAS NOT AS GOOD THEN AS IT IS NOW
I SEE.
WELL, IF YOU STILL WISH TO PLAY THE GAME OF WHICH I SPOKE..
I DO
FOLLOW ME, THEN, THROUGH THE PRIVASEAL. THERE AREN'T MANY LIKE IT. I HAD IT BUILT FOR ME BY OLD..
YAZ TREMSKI
HIS ABILITY IS KNOWN EVEN ON VENUS, THEN?
A MAN WHO CAN GUARANTEE ABSOLUTE PRIVACY, EVEN FROM ISA PARANORMALS, IS IN DEMAND WHEREVER THE EMPIRE'S LAWS ARE BEING BROKEN
AS THEY MOST CERTAINLY ARE HERE.
YOU COURT DEATH BY CATERING TO INTERSPECIES COHABITATION
AT THE VERY LEAST! BUT, AS YOU SAID, THERE IS NO THRILL WITH LOWER STAKES.
The heavy spice smoke lays over the room like a shroud. Through it, Sebastian Seasons directs the Venusians's attention to the bodies writhing on the cushioned floor.


QUITE BUT SURELY T WAS NEITHER AN ORGY NOR AN OPIATE TO WHICH YOU RE - FERRED WHEN YOU SPOKE OF A GAME ENCOMPASSING THE ULTIMATE THRILL ?
Suddenly the Venusian stops, staring at a Lunan wearing the uniform of a Terran Embassy chauffeur, standing as if on guard before a private sealed cubicle...
THAT CHAMBER ? WHY DOES IT STAND APART FROM THE REST ?
BECAUSE, SIR, IT HOUSES... THE GAME! THE ULTIMATE THRILL FOR A GAMBLER SUCH AS YOURSELF! A CHANCE TO PLAY AGAINST YOUR OWN NERVE--
-- WHERE THE STAKES ARE LIFE... OR DEATH!
YOU TEMPT ME, MR SEASONS I WILL PLAY
THEN I WILL ORDER THE BANK TO CONVERT ALL YOUR WINNINGS FOR ONE SHOT AT THE GAME PASS THROUGH THE PRIVASEAL MY FRIEND AND BE SEATED, AN ATTENDANT WILL SOON COME TO YOU TO EXPLAIN THE RULES.
On the other side of the shimmering screen, the tall Venusian blinks in the blackness broken only by circles of light upon which sit, unaware of his presence, persons of every race.

among them the widow of the late Terran Ambassador.
CATHERINE DE LYS!
PLEASE BE SEATED.
DO NOT DISTURB THE OTHER PARTICI-PANTS
In the chamber's darkness, the features of the Venusian gambler give way to the Terran profile of Paradox.
YES I UNDER-STAND
BUT DO I? SEBASTIAN SEASONS THROWS A GREAT PARTY, BUT SURELY THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS WIFE KNEW ENOUGH ABOUT HIS CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES TO HAVE BEEN WARY OF SOCIALIZING WITH HIM, LET ALONE VISIT HIS PLEASURE PALACE
ARE YOU READY TO BEGIN THE GAME SIR?
THE GAME? OH YES I'M READY

I WAS TOLD TO EXPECT A VENUSIAN.
YOU WERE MISTAKEN
FORGIVE ME, SIR IF YOU WILL SWALLOW THIS CUBE, WE CAN BEGIN.
WHAT IS IT?
FIREFLITE
THE TIMER IS SET FOR SIXTY CYLES, SIR THAT IS THE TERMINAL LIMIT OF THE FIREFLITE WHICH IS EVEN NOW COURSING THROUGH YOUR BLOODSTREAM. YOU HAVE 59 SUBCYCLES IN WHICH TO TAKE THE ANT DOTE CAPSULE.
OR I GO 'FERNO
YOU HAVE PLAYED THE GAME BEFORE THEN SIR?
NOT EXACTLY

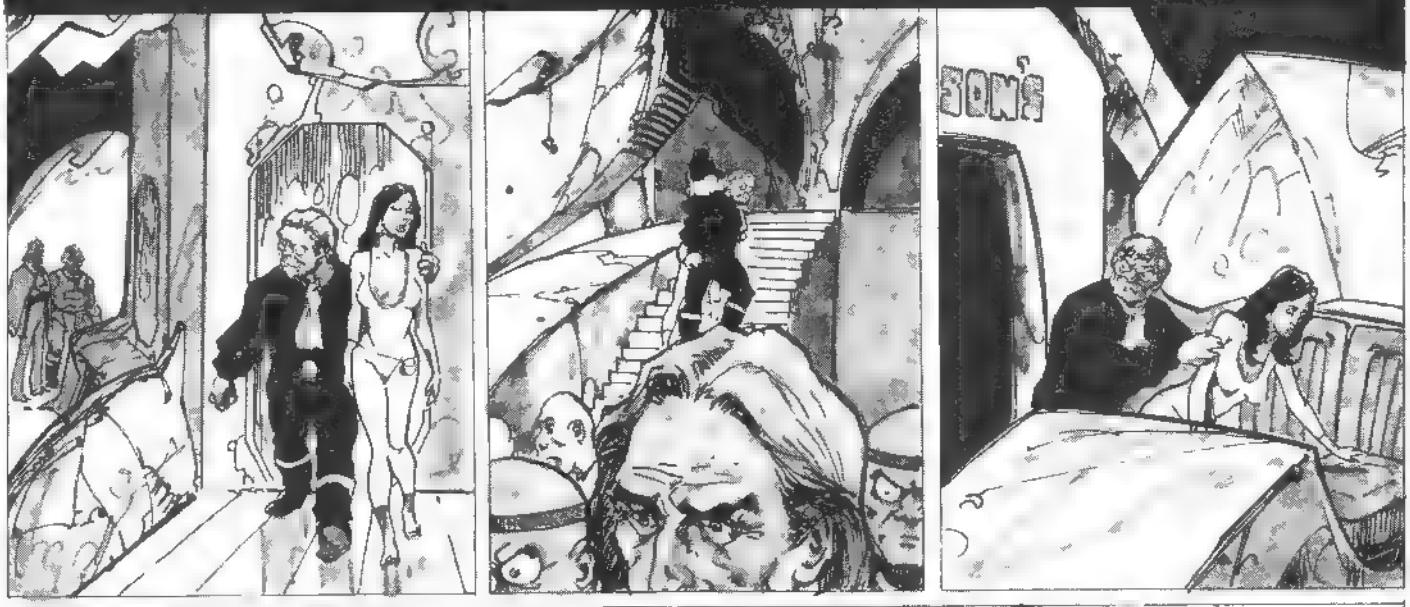
REMEMBER, SIR-- 59 SUBCYCLES
But Paradox is beyond remembering.
His body is on fire. His mind is freezing, slowing, making it hard for him to think. Reality collapses in upon itself like a neutron star. At last he understands the "thrill" of Sebastian Seasons' "game".
How can one swallow the fireflite antidote capsule time when one is no longer aware of time?
AMBASSADOR DELYS?!
YES, THIS IS THE WAY I CAME
BUT WHO BROUGHT YOU HERE?
ASK MY WIFE, YOUNG MAN
CATHERINE?

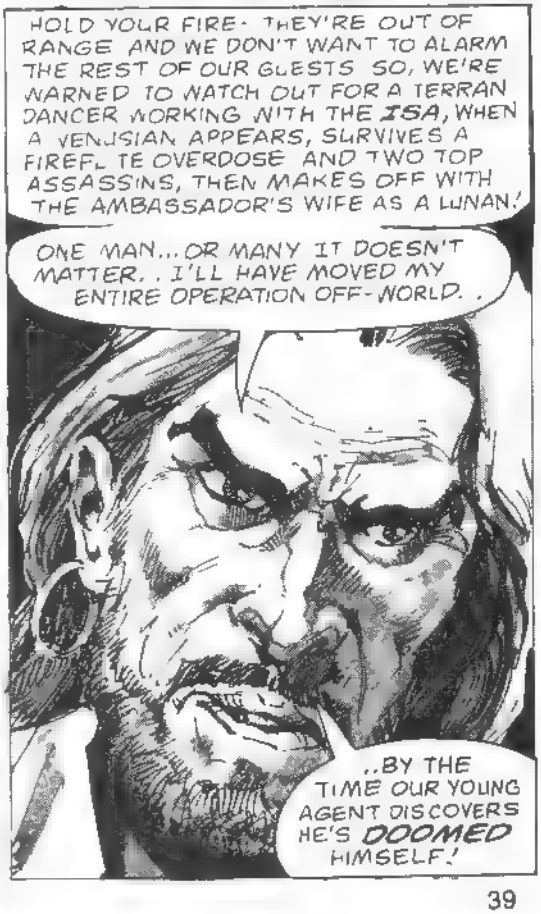
:25
HE'S UNDER! IT'S A GOOD THING THAT MERCURIAN WHORE ALERTED MR SEASONS TO BE ON THE WATCH FOR HIM
BUT HOW'D HE MAKE US THINK HE LOOKED LIKE A VENUSIAN?
:29
TELEPATHICS? WHO CARES? THE POINT IS WITH THE FIREFLITE IN HIS BLOODSTREAM, HE'S GONNA BE AN EASY KILL.'
HEY! HE'S REACH-.NG FOR THE ANTI-DOTE CAPSULE'
TH- THAT'S CRAZY! IT MEANS HE SENSES HE'S IN DANGER EVEN THROUGH HIS FIRE-FLITE HAZE'
HE'S TRYIN'TO END THE TRIP SO HE CAN PROTECT HIMSELF!
:33
NOBODY'S EVER DONE THIS BEFORE!
AND HE WON'T DO IT AGAIN! TAKE HIM!
His lungs screaming for air, Paradox finds himself floating in a seething sea. It would be so easy to cease struggling to succumb.

To retreat from the pain he feels being inflicted upon his physical self even as his mind welcomes the chemical fire coursing through his nervous system
:37
WILLPOWER, BOY-- THAT'S THE TICKET! COLLECT YER WITS AN' GIVE 'EM A FIGHT FOR THEIR CREDITS!
WHAT'S KEEPING THE FAIRY ON HIS FEET?
:42
THERE ARE TWO OF THEM, YAZ.
YA CAME TA ME FOR A TOY, BOY-- PLAY!
OKAY, YAZ
WHUNFF!
:49
VREEEEE
THAT'S IT, BOY! BRING THE HOUSE DOWN!
RIGHT!
VREEOW
GLEAGHH!

FOUGHT BACK TO MY SENSES! TIMER'S ALMOST RUN OUT! GOT TO REACH THE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE!
NO!
YES!
SWOK
:58
:59
MADE IT, WITH LESS THAN A CYCLE TO SPARE
CATHERINE!
TAKE YOUR MEDICINE PRETTY LADY BEFORE YOUR BLOOD BOILS LIKE A MERCURIAN PLATINUM SPRING
Outside the chamber...
THE GAME IS OVER GO IN AND SEE TO THE REMAINS BEFORE OUR OTHER PLAYERS COME TO.
YES, MR SEASONS

As Season's Lunans enter the chamber, another Lunan escorts the dazed Catherine De Lys through a separate privaseal, up a stairway often used by those not wishing to be seen entering or leaving the famed pleasure palace, and out to a waiting flyer.




HOLD YOUR FIRE- THEY'RE OUT OF RANGE AND WE DON'T WANT TO ALARM THE REST OF OUR GUESTS SO, WE'RE WARNED TO WATCH OUT FOR A TERRAN DANCER WORKING WITH THE ISA, WHEN A VENUSIAN APPEARS, SURVIVES A FIREFLITE OVERDOSE AND TWO TOP ASSASSINS, THEN MAKES OFF WITH THE AMBASSADOR'S WIFE AS A LUNAN!
ONE MAN... OR MANY IT DOESN'T MATTER.. I'LL HAVE MOVED MY ENTIRE OPERATION OFF-WORLD..
..BY THE TIME OUR YOUNG AGENT DISCOVERS HE'S DOOMED HIMSELF!

The flyer soars the Express Tubeway towards the Terran Embassy.
In the passenger seat, a bewildered young woman awakens.
D-DRIVER, ARE YOU TAKING ME HOME?
YES, MADAME-- THE PARTY'S OVER.
YOU?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?! WHERE'S MY REGULAR CHAUFFEUR?
DEAD. I GOT TO HIM BEFORE HE GOT TO ME. BUT JUST BARELY NICE HELP YOU H.RE--
--OR WAS HE REFERRED TO YOU BY THE SEBASTIAN SEASONS ASSASSINS EMPLOYMENT AGENCY.
HE WAS SEASON'S MAN. HIS JOB WAS TO GUARD ME AND TO MAKE SURE I TOOK MY MEDICINE
FIREFLITE?
YES. YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE CRAVING THAT COMES OVER YOU WHEN.
WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY? WHAT'S YOUR GAME? BLACKMAIL? THAT'S FUNNY! YOU THINK THAT BECAUSE YOU'VE DISCOVERED THAT MY LATE HUSBAND DIED FROM THE STUFF--AND THAT I'VE GOT A HABIT--THAT YOU CAN GET SOMETHING FROM ME? WHAT? MONEY? EMBASSY SECRETS? SEX?
I JUST WANT TO TAKE YOU HOME, MRS DeLYS

THE EMBASSY ROBOSENTRIES WILL NEVER LET YOU THROUGH
THEY'LL WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MY REGULAR PILOT...
PASS.
OH.
Inside the elegant Terran Embassy...
WELL BE IN MY HUSBAND'S STUDY, LARA LET NO ONE DISTURB US.
YES, MADAME.
In the study, a holoportrait of the late Ambassador DeLys stares sternly down as Paradox sheds his Lunan form.
YOU MAKE THAT SEEM ALMOST NATURAL, MY SHAPE-SHIFTING FRIEND. YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY FAR MORE THAN JUST THE MOST FAMOUS DANSEUR IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM
I'M WITH THE INTERPLANETARY SECURITY AGENCY, MRS. DeLYS. WE'VE KNOWN ABOUT RAMPANT FIREFLITE ABUSE WITHIN THIS EMBASSY FOR QUITE SOME TIME, BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL YOUR HUSBAND'S DEATH THAT WE REALIZED IT EXTENDED AS HIGH AS THE AMBASSADOR HIMSELF.
WE ALSO SUSPECT THAT WHOEVER WAS SUPPLYING THE FIREFLITE DID SO WITH THE OBJECT OF OBTAINING EMBASSY INFORMATION IN EXCHANGE FOR THE ANTIDOTE
WE DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY YOUR HUSBAND SUCCUMBED TO THE ADDICTION, BUT WE SURMISE THAT, BEING AN HONORABLE MAN, HE CHOSE TO GO 'FERNO IN A CROWDED EXPRESS TUBEWAY RATHER THAN BETRAY HIS DUTY.
IT'S A SHAME THAT HE DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE HE DIED THAT HIS BLACKMAILER HAD AN ACE-IN-THE-HOLE. THEY'D ALSO ADDICTED YOU.
YES.

YOU'RE FROM TERRA, PARADOX I WAS BORN HERE ON LUNA.
YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW UNRELIEVEDLY DULL SUCH A LIFE COULD BE FOR A GIRL OF ENORMOUS WEALTH I SOUGHT EXCITEMENT EARLY-
--THE ULTIMATE EXCITEMENT ON LUNA BEING... FIREFLITE. THERE IS NO CURE FOR SUCH AN ADDICTION, PARADOX-- ONLY A TEMPORARY ANTIDOTE
THE PRICE FOR THE ANTIDOTE WAS ALWAYS WELL WITHIN MY MEANS UNTIL I MARRIED THE AMBASSADOR.
THEN THE PRICE CHANGED FROM CREDITS TO SECRETS.
WORSE. THE ASKING PRICE FOR ONE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE BECAME CONDITIONAL ON MY LATE HUSBAND'S TAKING FIREFLITE HIMSELF.
FOR MY WELFARE, HE AGREED. BUT HE BALKED AT BETRAYING HIS WORLD AND, AS YOU SAID, WENT 'FERNO ONE FINE DAY
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU? HIS BLACKMAILERS WEREN'T DETERRED BY MY HUSBAND'S DEATH! THEY KNEW THERE WERE OTHER IMPORTANT MINISTERS CONNECTED WITH THE EMBASSY WILLING TO REVEAL SENSITIVE INFORMATION TO THE BEAUTIFUL WIDOW OF THEIR DEAR DEPARTED COLLEAGUE!
I WAS FORCED TO DO IT, JUST AS I WAS FORCED TO MARRY AMBASSADOR DELYS! OH! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!
CATHERINE STOP IT!
WHO FORCED YOU CATHERINE?
THE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE--YOU'VE BROKEN IT!
I GAVE YOU AN ANTIDOTE CAPSULE BEFORE WE LEFT SEASONS' GAME ROOM.
YOU FOOL! I TOLD YOU, IT'S ONLY TEMPORARY! THE ANTIDOTE HAS TO BE RENEWED--
--OR THE FIREFLITE IMBALANCE IN YOUR BLOOD STARTS THE HALLUCINATORY PHASE THAT LEADS TO DEATH! W-WE COULD HAVE SHARED THE CAPSULE!
SHARED?
YOU PLAYED SEASONS GAME, DIDN'T YOU? YOU DOOMED YOURSELF! YOU'RE ADDICTED TOO!
SHE'S STARTING TO HALLUCINATE ALREADY! I'LL WAGER IT'S ONLY MY GENGINEERED METABOLISM THAT'S STAVING OFF THE FIREFLITE IMBALANCE IN ME.. BUT FOR HOW LONG?
CATHERINE--THE ANTIDOTE CAPSULES-- WHERE DO YOU GET THEM?
HE GIVES THEM TO ME--TEE HEE--FOR BEING A GOOD GIRL!
WHO IS "HE"?
WHY MR SEASONS!

Less than half a rotation later, Paradox has left Catherine DeLys in the care of her servants, paid a visit to Sebastian Seasons' casino only to find it closed and Seasons gone and, finally, arrived at the Weaponsmith's shop of his friend...
YAZ!
ARE YOU ACQUAINTED W TH THE VICT M, SIR?
YES, YOU SOULLESS SILVER SCRAPHEAP! THE VICTIM IS MY FRIEND!
WHO DID THIS TO YOU, YAZ?
FELLER COME IN, SAID HE WAS A FR END OF YOURS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I D SOLD YA BUT I KNOW A SPICE-SMUGGLER WHEN I SMELL ONE.
HE PLAYED ROUGH -- HAD A COUPLE OF LUNANS WORK ME OVER -- USED MY OWN STOCK TA DO IT.
WHEN THEY FIGURED I WASN T HEAR N NOTHIN' NO MORE THEY STOOD AROUND AN DISCUSSED STUFF SEEMS THERE S A REVOLUT ON BREW N LUNANS WANT TERRANS OUT--
--AN THEY RE USIN' FIREFLITE TA GET ENOUGH NFO TA FIGHT TERRA WITH HER OWN SECRETS GENT NAMED SEASONS SUPPLIES THE STUFF
I KNOW, YAZ
YEAH, WELL -- YOU'VE SCARED 'EM BOY THEY RE GETTIN' T OFF-WORLD..
YAZ?

PARDON ME, SIR, BUT I MUST MAKE MY REPORT. WHAT WAS IT THE DECEASED SAID TO YOU?
NONE OF YOUR DAMNED BUSINESS
I'M AFRAID YOUR ANSWER IS UNACCEPTABLE SIR I MUST DETAIN YOU FOR INTERROGATION.
YOU DO AND YAZ WON'T BE THE ONLY DEAD TERRAN ON LUNA TONIGHT--
--AND I'M JUST NOT GOING TO ALLOW ANY MORE!
VREEOW
=SQUEE=
Pandemonium reigns and, in the ensuing chaos, the enigmatic Lunan slips away unobserved.
THE ISA'S GOT ALL THE SPACEPORTS CLOSED DOWN, BUT IF THIS IS A LUNAN OPERATION--
--THEN THE LOGICAL PLACE TO SMUGGLE FIREFLITE ON OR OFF-WORLD SAFE FROM TERRAN EYES
...IS SOMEWHERE THAT NO TERRAN WOULD EVER DARE GO--THE METALMINES!
CAUTION 0-GRAVITY PAST THIS POINT
LOAD THE SHIP QUICKLY!
PHARMACEUTICALS--THE KIND THAT CAN FRY A MAN IN MINUTES! I'VE GOT TO STOP SEASONS AND GET HOLD OF A FIREFLITE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE BEFORE CATHERINE AND I GO 'FERNO!
BUT THERE'S NO AIR OUT IN THE LUNAR ATMOSPHERE OF THE LAUNCH PAD SO HOW?. AH-HA!
PHARMACEUTICALS
PHARMACY

HAI-YAHN!
Striking down the Lunan before he can broadcast an alarm to his fellows on the launch platform, Paradox drags the body into the shadows...
...and emerges seconds later wearing both the face and the spacesuit of his victim.

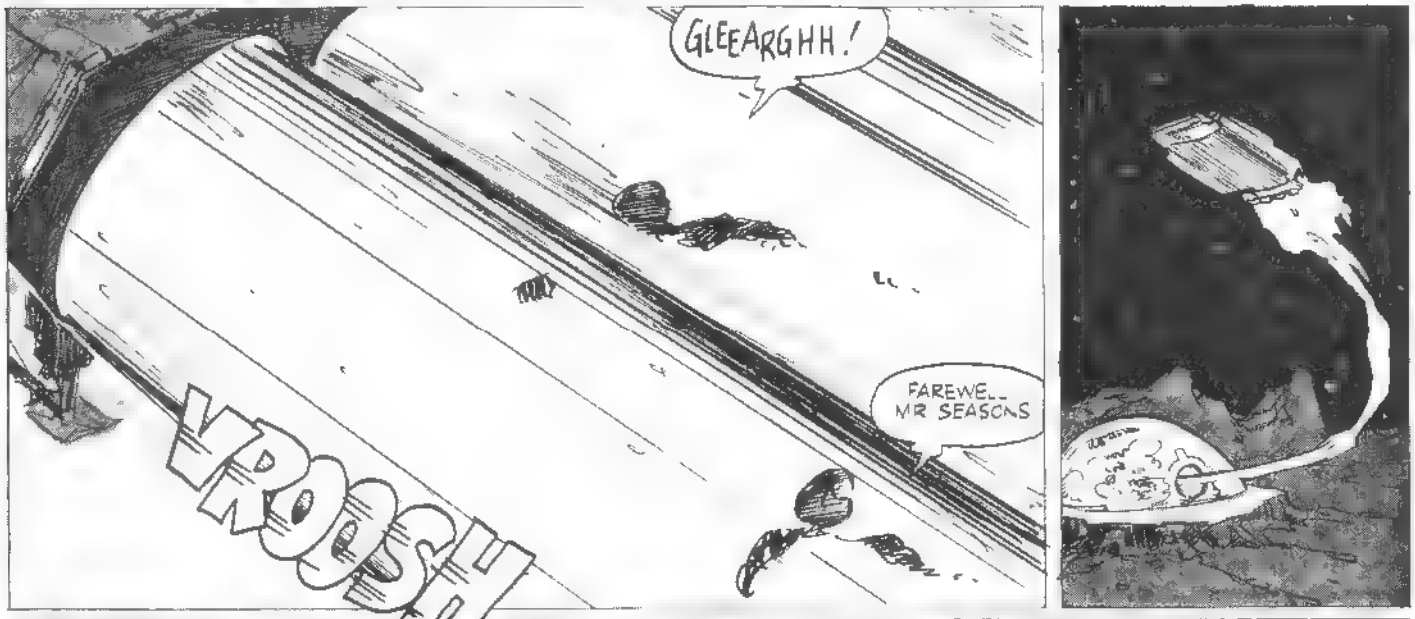
His passage through the airlock excites little curiosity.
WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE AID YOU HAVE GIVEN OUR REVOLT ON TERRAN'
KEEP YOUR GRATITUDE JUST MAKE SURE I COLLECT MY FIVE MILLION CREDITS WHEN I DUMP THIS STUFF OFF-WORLD

BLOOD MONEY SEASONS? COLLECTING FOR WHAT YOU AND YOUR BOYS DID TO AMBASSADOR DELYS AND OLD YAZ?

THE SA SHAPE-SHIFTER. YOU TOLD US HE WOULD HAVE GONE 'FERNO BY NOW'
WELL HE DON'T, SO BLAST HIM!
A trio of blasters slither from their holsters with unaccustomed slowness in the low-inertia Lunar gravity of the launch pad...

...but, where Sebastion Seasons and his Lunan allies are hampered by their low-inertia awkwardness, Paradox -- the premier antigravity dancer in the Solar System -- is in his element!
TWO DOWN--
--ONE TO GO
THAT LEAVES YOU, SEASONS.
I HEARD YOU RADIO YOUR PILOT TO BE READY FOR LAUNCH AS SOON AS YOU SHOOK ME
DO YOU THINK HE'LL KNOW WHICH ONE OF US TO TAKE?
S-SHE WAS RIGHT. YOU ARE A SHAPE-SHIFTER.
SHE?
SURE I'M ONLY A SPICE-SMUGGLER RUNNING FREELANCE ON THE SIDE. WHAT DO I KNOW -- OR CARE -- ABOUT LUNA TERRAN RELATIONS?
SHE PAYS ME AND I DO WHAT SHE WANTS.

YOU'RE STALLING SEASONS--NOT GIVING ME A NAME. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR PILOT WOULD DO IF I ORDERED HIM IN YOUR VOICE, TO START THE BLAST-OFF NOW?
YOU'RE MAD. WE'RE BOTH DIRECTLY IN THE PATH OF THE THRUSTER ROCKETS
WE'D BE CREMATED INSTANTLY!
BETTER THAN A SLOW DEATH... LIKE BEING LEFT TO FRY ON A RADIOACTIVE ASTEROID
YOU--YOU LIVED?!
SEASONS TO PILOT. I CAN'T SHAKE THIS GUY! BLAST OFF WITHOUT ME
AT ONCE MR. SEASONS
YES SEASONS, I LIVED--TO SEE YOU BURN IN HELL
N-NO!



Seconds later, an airlock hisses open to reveal a gaunt, alien figure in the melted remains of a spacesuit.

Mercurians, it should be noted, have little use for oxygen, and a remarkable tolerance for extremely high temperatures.

Paradox has revenged himself and his friend.

Leaving the launchpad Paradox alerts the ISA.
..NTER-CEPT FRE-FL TE SH.P AND MEET ME AT THE TERRAN EMBASSY N 30 SUB-CYCLES
BUT W TH SEASONS DEAD. ?
HE WASN T THE BLACK-MA LER
WE LL BE THERE.
Ten subcycles later...
TH S S HARDLY HOW I EXPECTED TO F ND YOU, MRS. DeLYS.
WHO--? PARADOX?!
YOU SOUND SURPR SED.
I THOUGHT--
THAT I D GONE 'FERNO BY NOW?
NO. I HAD A PLEASANT CHAT W TH SEBAST AN SEASONS, THOUGH YOU LL BE GLAD TO HEAR THAT HE WON T BE TROUBLING YOU ANYMORE SAID HE WAS GOING ON A TR.P.
HE D D G VE ME THESE BEFORE HE ..DEPARTED
ANT DOTE CAPSULES.
I THOUGHT YOU D BE DESPERATE FOR ONE BY NOW
I-I AM. COME--S.T BES DE ME AND WE LL TAKE THEM TOGETHER
NOW LET ME HAVE...
WA T WE VE ST LL A L TTLE T ME

THE LONGER WE WAIT BEFORE TAKING THE ANTI-DOTE, THE MORE HEIGHTENED WILL BECOME OUR SENSATIONS OF PLEASURE AS THE FIREFLITE COURSES THROUGH OUR BLOODSTREAM.
BUT--!
YOU SAID YOU WERE BORED. THINK OF THE ULTIMATE THRILL OF DARING DEATH IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS.
I SEE. THEN MY SAVIOR DOES HAVE A PRICE?
YES.

CATHERINE - THE HALLUCINATORY PHASE -- IT'S STARTED FOR ME
IT MEANS WE'RE CLOSE MY LOVER
CLOSE TO DEATH!
ONE NEEDS TO BE CLOSE TO DEATH TO APPRECIATE LIFE!

PARADOX--THE FIRE!
YOU MEAN THE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE YOU HID FROM ME AND TOOK AFTER I LEFT TO STOP SEASONS IS WEARING OFF?
I YOU KNEW?!
THAT YOU HOPED I'D DIE AT EITHER SEASONS' HAND OR GO 'FERNO?
I SUSPECTED AS MUCH WHEN SEASONS TOLD ME BEFORE HIS DEATH THAT HE TOOK HIS ORDERS FROM A WOMAN.
THERE S ONLY ONE NOMAN I KNOW OF ON ALL OF LUNA CAPABLE OF COMMANDING A VETERAN SPICE-SMUGGLER, AND OF SELLING HER HUSBAND IN EXCHANGE FOR FIREFLITE.
DAMN YOU, GIVE ME THE ANTIDOTE BEFORE WE GO 'FERNO!
FIRST I WANT THE TRUTH, CATHERINE-- ALL OF IT NOT THAT I THINK YOU'LL TELL ME THE TRUTH--
--BUT I'M NOT PARADOX NOW, CATHERINE.
I'M YOU-- THE ONLY PERSON WHOSE LIFE YOU VALUE IN ALL THE SOLAR SYSTEM. YOU'VE GOT 12 SUB-CYCLES TO TELL ME THE TRUTH...

OR YOU'LL DIE TWICE!
NO!
YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME
SWA
GIVE ME THE ANTIDOTE, OR I LL--!
21:48
SHOOT YOURSELF, CATHERINE? CAN YOU DO IT? I DON'T THINK SO. TEN SUBCYCLES LEFT.
GIVE ME THOSE CAPSULES
ALL IT WILL TAKE TO GET THEM IS THE TRUTH.
THE TRUTH. FIVE SUBCYCLES BEFORE 'FERNO, CATHERINE.
I--
21:45

-- I'M MOT CATHERINE WORTH OR CATHERINE DELYS SHE NEVER EXISTED
' BY ADDICTING TERRAN SCIENTISTS, WE PROCURED ENOUGH INFORMATION THROUGH BLACKMAIL TO BEGIN GENGINEERING OUR OWN PEOPLE THE TERRANS WE ALLOWED TO GO 'FERNO SOON AFTER.
I'M A LUNAN.
I WAS GENGINEERED TO BE BEAUTIFUL IN TERRAN TERMS..
"BUT HE COULD NOT BE SEDUCED INTO TREASON
" HIS WEAKNESS WAS THAT HE GENUINELY LOVED ME, SO-WE-- THE LUNAN REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL-- HIT AT HIM THAT WAY BY CONVINCING HIM THAT I HAD BECOME A FIREFLITE USER
" TRUE ENOUGH, EXCEPT THAT THE OLD FOOL DIDN'T KNOW THAT FIREFLITE HAS NO EFFECT ON LUNAN PHYSIOLOGY, TO WHICH I WOULD BE GENGINEERED BACK AS SOON AS MY WORK WAS DONE.
" THE AMBASSADOR COOPERATED WITH US.. FOR A TIME. BUT HE WAS A PROUD OLD MAN, AND HE SOON OUT SMARTED US.
' WITHOUT OUR KNOWING, HE TOOK A FIREFLITE CUBE HIMSELF--
" -- AND ALLOWED HIMSELF TO GO 'FERNO, SECURE IN HIS BELIEF THAT I WOULD PREFER TO JOIN HIM IN DEATH RATHER THAN SEE HIM BETRAY HIS WORLD FURTHER."
ISN'T THAT AMUSING? THE OLD FOOL KILLED HIMSELF.. FOR ME!

YOU CAN SHUT DOWN THE HIDDEN HOLOVO D RECORDERS NOW, MEN-- I THINK WE'VE HEARD ENOUGH TO CONVICT "MRS. DELYS" OF TREASON.
ESTERHASE' BETTER LET HER TAKE THE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE FIRST
SHE MAY BE A LUNAN, BUT AS A GENGI-NEERED TERRAN SHE'LL STILL GO 'FERNO UNLESS THE FIREFLITE IN HER BLOOD IS NEUTRALIZED.
As the false Catherine DeLys is led away by the Agents of the ISA, Bureau Chief Esterhase turns to Paradox
I WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU, YOUR METHODS WERE A BIT UNORTHODOX, BUT YOU DID BREAK THIS CASE AND NIP A BREWING REVOLUTION IN THE BUD.
SO WE'RE FRIENDS, NOW, SIR?
THEN YOU WON'T MIND HANDING ME THAT ANT DOTE CAPSULE ON THE TRAY BEHIND YOU, THEN?
THE ONE I TOOK AFTER I SLEW SEBASTIAN SEASONS IS WEARING OFF.
UNLESS I RENEW IT...
AH, YES -- YOU DID MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT HAVING TAKEN THE RATHER UNUSUAL STEP OF ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BECOME AN FIREFLITE ADDICT N ORDER TO GET CLOSE TO THE AMBASSA-DOR'S WIFE.
AND THIS LITTLE CAPSULE IS ALL IT WILL TAKE TO KEEP YOU FROM GOING 'FERNO?
YOU'RE A NEW BREED OF AGENT, PARADOX-- AS YOUR VERY NAME SUGGESTS

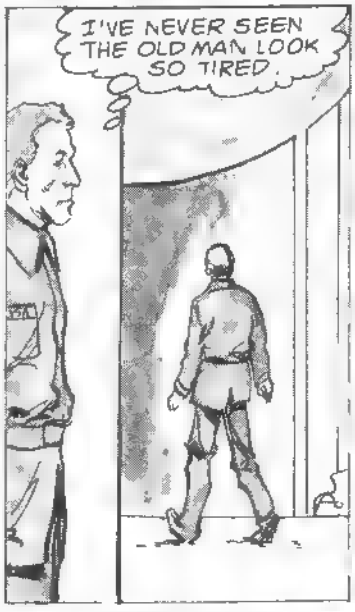
UNLIKE MY SON-- WHO WAS HEROIC, UNQUESTIONING OF HIS SUPERIORS, PREDICTABLE.
. YOU'RE TOO BLOODY UNPREDICTABLE! WE NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'LL DO, OR HOW YOUR MIND WORKS! YOU TAKE ORDERS FROM NOBODY, REPORT TO NOBODY! YOU'RE JUST NOT A... COMPANY MAN, IF YOU TAKE MY MEANING.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, ESTERHASE? THAT YOU'RE GOING TO LET ME DIE-- THAT YOU'RE GOING TO STAND THERE AND WATCH ME GO 'FERNO-- BECAUSE MY METHODS ARE SUCCESSFUL?
CAN YOU DO IT, ESTERHASE?
CAN YOU STAND BY--
-- AND WATCH YOUR OWN SON ERUPT INTO FLAMES BEFORE YOUR EYES?
WELL... FATHER?
DAMN YOU! YOU'RE NOT MY SON! YOU'VE MERELY DUPLICATED THE HOLOVOID PORTRAIT OF MARK THAT I SHOWED YOU ABOARD THE SHUTTLE!
BUT YOU'RE NOT SURE, ARE YOU,.. DAD?
IS NOTHING SACRED TO YOU? I-- I DIED WITH MY BOY!
LIFE WITHOUT HIM WAS UNBEARABLE! I TRIED EVERYTHING TO FORGET! EVERYTHING!

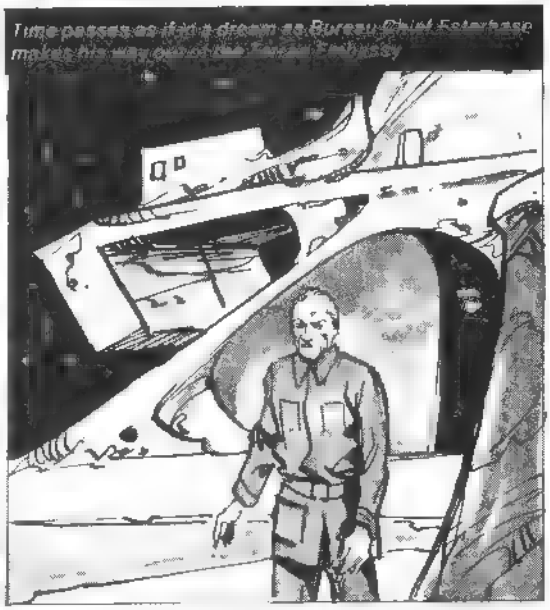
EVEN FIREFLITE

YOU FOUND CATHERINE DELYS BEAUTIFUL FATHER.. AS DID MOST MEN. SHE HELPED YOU FORGET YOUR GRIEF.
...AND, WHEN SHE SUGGESTED YOU TRY FIREFLITE WITH HER..

THERE'S ONLY ONE ANTIDOTE CAPSULE LEFT, FATHER--AND TWO OF US ONE SUBCYCLE AWAY FROM GOING 'FERNO.
WHICH OF US IS GOING TO LEAVE THIS CHAMBER ALIVE?
21:55

The chamber door hisses open...
SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE ENTERS OR LEAVES THIS ROOM
VERY GOOD, CHIEF ESTERHASE


I'VE NEVER SEEN THE OLD MAN LOOK SO TIRED.


Time passes as if in a dream as Bureau Chief Esterhase makes his way [illegible]

FARE WELL, FATHER

Later...
POOR OLD DAD. FINDING OUT WHO I WAS, WHAT I'D BECOME, MUST HAVE ADDLED HIS AGENT'S WITS--
-- OR HE WOULD HAVE REALIZED THAT I'D BURNED THE FIREFLITE OUT OF MY SYSTEM WHEN I BECAME A MERCURIAN AFTER MY ENCOUNTER WITH SEBASTIAN SEASONS.
HMMMM... I WONDER WHEN THE NEXT SHUTTLE LEAVES FOR TERRA?

EPILOGUE: TERRA, TWO WEEKS LATER...
JUST A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING
ISN'T PARADOX INCREDIBLE?! I COULD WATCH HIM DANCE ALL NIGHT!
I COULD WATCH HIM DO ANYTHING-- PROVIDED IT'S W TH ME!
He dances, as ever, to a capacity crowd -- his mind and body soaring gracefully above their mundane babble.
I HEAR HE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM LUNA WHERE HE HAD A LIASON WITH THAT DEAD AMBASSADOR'S WIFE!
I WISH HE'D HAVE A LIASON WITH ME!
I GATHER THE WOMAN WAS A LUNAN-- A REVOLUTIONARY!
YES, THE ISA SUSPECTED PARADOX-- THEN DROPPED THEIR INVESTIGATION!
While dancing, he hears none of it. He lives only for the movement of his limbs through an antigravity environment.
YOU SEE HOW HE MOVES, LADS-- LIKE AN ANGEL? HE'S THE BEST THERE IS... AND I DON'T MEAN ONLY WHEN HE'S DANCING! WHY, IF I HAD A HALF DOZEN AGENTS LIKE HIM...!
HE'S A TRAITOR, CHIEF STANHOPE! THE WHOLE AGENCY KNOWS WHAT HE DID ON LUNA!
I KNOW. POOR, POOR ESTERHASE...
IF YOU DON'T MIND I'M TRYING TO HEAR THE DANCING!
A THOUSAND PARDONS, MADAME, WE WERE JUST LEAVING
HMMPH! PLEBES!
Like a tired hunter after a pair of bloodhounds, Interplanetary Security Agency Chief of Operations Stanhope follows his agents backstage.

Meanwhile, unaware that his last few cycles of life are numbered, Paradox accepts the accolades of his audience and of the Empire, tuned in on a million million Holovoids.
Then, after numerous encores, he heads for his dressing room...
SOMETHING'S WRONG. DOOR'S OPEN.
ER-- AH, COME IN, MY BOY! MARVELOUS PERFORMANCE! SIMPLY BREATHTAKING .. AS ALWAYS!
WELL, WELL STANHOPE! I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE MY DEBRIEFING!
AH YES! WHERE YOU GAVE YOUR VERSION OF THAT UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT ON LUNA.
THERE WAS NO OTHER VERSION AT LEAST NONE I'M AWARE OF, ESTERHASE--
-- MY FATHER -- WAS A F.REFLITE ADDICT, A DANGER TO THE ISA AND PERHAPS TO THE EMPIRE!
BUT HE WAS SUCH A GOOD BUREAU CHIEF, MY BOY- ALWAYS DOING WHAT HE WAS TOLD-- FILING REPORTS-- ETCETERA..
PREDICTABLE -- PERHAPS THAT'S THE WORD I'M LOOKING FOR WE KNEW WHAT WAS ON HIS RATHER MEDIOCRE LITTLE MIND. THERE WERE NEVER ANY SHARP TURNS -- ANY SUDDEN FLASHES OF INSIGHT-- ANY SURPRISES.
YOU -- MY BOY, ARE ALL SURPRISES! SEE IT OUR WAY--
-- HOW ARE WE EVER TO PREDICT THE ACTIONS OF AN AGENT WHO'D BE WILLING TO KILL HIS OWN FATHER?!
OOF!
I'VE HEARD THIS SPEECH BEFORE... SIR! IT ENDS, SO I'M AFRAID WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TERMINATE YOU!" IT WAS DAD -- GOOD OLD PREDICTABLE DAD-- WHO SPOUTED IT LAST!
BUT I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE-- SO UP YOURS, FAT MAN!
GNNGG!
VREET
SPAK
OH, HELLO, BOYS-- COME FOR THE PARTY???!
DAMN YOU!

VREE
REET
CAREFUL, LOVER-BOY! LITTLE AGENTS WITH BIG MOUTHS ALL TOO OFTEN FIND THEIR BLOOD BOILED!
LIKE AN OLD FRIEND YOU'VE PROBABLY NOT HEARD OF ONCE TOLD ME, "LIVE AND LET LIVE BOYO -- BUT DROP 'EM HALF A CYCLE BEFORE THEY DROP YOU!"
THAT WAS OLD YAZ, STANHOPE -- ONE OF THE BEST AGENTS YOU EVER HAD.
BEFORE ME! HE WAS UNPREDICTABLE, TOO -- WOULDN'T TAKE ORDERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY WERE MEANT TO GET HIM OFF-WORLD --
-- SO A CERTAIN FAT BUREAU CHIEF COULD DIDDLE HIS WIFE!
ANCIENT HISTORY!
YOU'RE RIGHT YAZ IS DEAD SO'S HIS WIFE. BUT LISTEN BEFORE YOU SIC ANY MORE OF YOUR INCOMPETENTS ON ME YAZ TAUGHT ME ALL HE KNEW GENGINEERING GAVE ME THE POWER TO ALTER MY SHAPE AT WILL.
YOUR POINT--?
THE AGENCY TRIED TO SCREW ME ON LUNA, SO I SCREWED THEM FIRST -- MAYBE BECAUSE I WAS TICKED OFF -- MAYBE TO PROVE I'M THE BEST THERE IS. TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY, BUT I'M STILL WILLING TO WORK FOR THE ISA ... OR ANYONE ELSE.
IN OTHER WORDS, IF WE KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR US, WE'D BETTER HAVE YOU WITH US THAN AGAINST US?
WELL, WHY NOT?
AFTER ALL, WITH YOU AN ORPHAN NOW, I FEEL CLOSER -- MORE PATERNAL -- TOWARDS YOU THAN EVER.
I'LL JUST BET, FAT MAN!
To all who encounter he is... a PARADOX

IN A BARBARIC WORLD WHERE BRUTALITY, CRUELTY AND DEATH ARE COMMONPLACE: WHERE THE EVILS OF SORCERY ARE NEVER ABSENT, ONLY ONE THING IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN KING KULL...

LOVE!

KULL: DEMON IN A SILVERED GLASS

by Doug Moench & John Bolton

Bizarre Adventures #26, On Sale Late April

SNEAK PREVIEW

by LYNN GRAEME

You are holding in your hands a *miracle -- Paradox!* No, not because its so great (although I think it's darned good) or because it was inspired by divine revelations It's a miracle that it ever appeared at all.

As you may know, MARVEL PREVIEW #24 was supposed to be *Lethal Ladies* However, because several of the people involved on that book ran into scheduling disasters, we had to put a rush on to get *Paradox* ready to appear in *Lethal Ladies'* place. Even as I write this (14 October '80) I'm wondering if Val Mayerik will be able to get the last few pages in to us by Friday (two days from my "now"), and if the production department will be able to finish everything before the book has to go out on Monday

Monday, you see, is DOOM DAY. No finish, no book.

I've spoken to Val at least once a day for the past two weeks Every time I speak to him he sounds closer to the edge (I went *over* the edge a long time ago). Val is in scenic Cleveland Heights drawing and ink-

One of the "Lethal Ladies;" The Black Widow (portrayed by Paul Gulacy) in a particularly somber mood

Just *one* of the incredibly beautiful panels from "Kull. Demon in a Silvered Glass " The artist is Great Britain's John Bolton.

They've loved and fought since 70,000,000 years ago: now one of them must kill the other. From "Kestrel Falconer." Art by Steve Bissette.

ing and toning as though his life depended on it Meanwhile, our production people have been hand-lettering balloons on *overlays* -- basically, a heavy tracing paper. Carl Gafford has been typesetting all the captions, which then have to be glued to the overlays in the proper position. Unfortunately, there is a small but significant difference between the size of the xeroxs off which we're working and the page size of the original art This means that our Prod. Dept has to cut away balloons and captions where they don't exactly fit, and glue them back down in the proper position

Multiply this aggravation by 56 or so pages....

Bill Mantlo, the rat, having finished his writing chores, simply giggles

We'll get you for that, Bill.

LETHAL LADIES will live! As you see on page 61, we're getting in some fabulous artwork from Mr.'s Gulacy, Rogers, and Golden. The page reproduced is by Paul Gulacy for The Black Widow story. Some of the other pages he's turned in so far show a lot of action, but I thought you might enjoy seeing Paul's version of the beautiful and deadly Widow in a more pensive mood. (*Lethal Ladies* is in MARVEL PREVIEW #25, on sale January '80.) The cover is by Paul Gulacy

MARVEL PREVIEW #26 will be *Kull: Demon in a Silvered Glass,* by Doug Moench and John Bolton. This is an *original* story -- not an adaptation. John's art is extremely beautiful to the point of being *lyrical*. Joe Jusko painted the cover.

After *Kull* we'll be offering *Kestrel Falconer.* This story begins 70,000,000 years ago and ends in 1985 But let's let the artist, Steve Bissette, have a few words (from a letter):

"This has the elements of a *strong* dramatic love story, since the characters of Kes and Thayer seem to be volatile. Their story has the potential to be an intense *comic* as well: the shifting of strong, exotic locales; potential for unusual visual effects with the time traveling sequences; intriguing science-fiction; mucho suspense and action; settings brimming with monsters, odd beasties, peasants, whores, witchfinder generals, soldiers, and the denizens of Manhattan; ample opportunity for humor -- and horror. A blend of grim history with the extremes of comicbook fantasy A tale of burning passion plastered across the tapesty of time! What more can

a kid, teenager, adult, grandparent ask for a measly $1.25?!"

Okay, Steve· but does it do windows?

Steve and I are co-plotting the story, and I'll do the script. Louise Jones, Marvel editor and nice lady, will edit this particular issue. The cover will be by Paul Gulacy.

IN THE FAR FUTURE? How about *The Silver Surfer* by Stan Lee and Gil Kane? We're also planning a horror issue starring Dracula, but otherwise featuring stories meant to disturb your sleep for many nights after the reading of them. The sketch of Dracula you see is from a cover rough (pencils) by Paul Gulacy.

The incredible Paul Gulacy again! This is a potential cover for an up-coming horror issue. (Reproduced from pencils.)

PRODUCTION DEPT. FOLLIES

You didn't think the production folks would let you down, did you? Herewith an anonymous take-off on that too-familiar staple of office life, THE MEMO·

SUBJECT: Standard Procedures

INSTRUCTIONS ON DEATH OF EMPLOYEE

TO ALL CONCERNED:

It has been brought to the attention of this office that many employees have been dying while on duty for apparently no good reason. Furthermore, that some employees are refusing to fall over after they are dead. This, in some cases, has resulted in unearned overtime payments which do not fit into our economy program.

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY — THIS MUST BE DISCONTINUED

On and after today, any employee found sitting up after he has died will be dropped from the payroll at once, without investigation under Regulation No. 20, Section D (non-productive labor.)

When it can be proven that the employee is being held up by a desk, typewriter, drawing board, telephone or any other means of support which is the property of the company, a 10 day period of grace will be granted.

The following procedure will be strictly adhered to. If, after several hours, it is noted that any employee has not moved or opened at least one eye, the department head will investigate. Because of the highly sensitive nature and origin of some employees and the close resemblance between death and their normal working attitude, the investigation will be made quietly to avoid waking the employee, if he or she is asleep (which is permitted under the present regime and union contract). If some doubt exists as to the true condition of the employee, a pay check will be used as the final test. If the employee fails to reach for the check, it is reasonable to assume that death has occurred.

***Note:** In some cases, the instinct is so strongly developed, that a spasmodic clutching action may occur. Do not be misled by this manifestation.*

In the event that any employee fails to abandon whatever he is doing at coffee-break time, no investigation is necessary, as this is conclusive proof that rigor-mortis has set in.

THE MANAGEMENT

Before signing off, I want to thank Rick Parker, Joe Albelo, John Morelli, Nora Maclin, Barry Shapiro, Eliot Brown and chief overseer/slavedriver Danny Crespi for putting up with extreme aggravation in order to make *Paradox* possible.

Lynn

is so crowded with stuff that I have a perfect no-place to put it).

First of all, Behar took some shocking liberties with Guinevere. To begin with, he shouldn't have called her "lady;" to a Queen, that would be an insufferable insult. She is, after all, the second highest ranking person in her realm, and no mere "lady." And Beliar would never have kissed her, either; the person of the queen was sacrosanct. No matter that he was the devil's son, he would have lost his head for that (Lancelot is the exception; he and the Queen were co-conspirators).

Second, a more grievous error, if there really was an Arthur, he'd be rolling over in his grave thanks to this one. You simply cannot call Arthur "King of England." He is referred to as "King of Britain," or, more correctly, "King of the Britons." There was no England at this time. Indeed, England is named after the Angle invaders, and Arthur's life was devoted to stemming the tide of the Angles flowing into Britain, as well as the Saxons and other tribes. Nothing would have been more aversive to him than being called "King of England." Bill Mantlo and Steven Grant did an excellent job on their text pieces, and both seem to have a real understanding of Arthuriana, actual and legendary. You should have had them proofread the story.

If Doug and John are up to it, I'd like to see further Arthurian epics from them; this story was so nicely done, and fits so well as an embellishment to the original legend (every mythical hero ought to descend into hell to save a fair damsel at least *once*), and since Arthur was already tied in so closely with Christian religious tradition, the story worked quite well on that level. Why not do a sequel and use Morgan LeFay, or the Grail, or the Questing Beast? John's art is splendidly suited to doing the whole legend graphically, if that's to his liking. It would certainly be to mine.

One last note on the text pieces. Bill and Steven included most of the best Arthur books, both legendary and pseudo-historical; but they left out some recent good ones, which are not yet part of the canon (and so don't belong in an article on that subject anyway), but which deserve to be mentioned, at any rate. Thomas Berger's *Arthur Rex* (1978) is now out in paperback, and is a very funny, Americanized debunking of the legend. Catherine Christian's *The Pendragon* (1978) re-tells the legend in the context of its Celtic roots, circa A.D. 500, rather than the usual anachronistic medieval setting; and lastly, Richard Barber has just published a glorious anthology of all the legends (*The Arthurian Legends*, Littlefield Adams 1980), including excerpts from each, that you really just can't do without if you're going to get into this subject any further. I highly recommend it.

Robert E. Rodi
34 Chatham Lane
Oak Brook, IL 60521

Dear John & Doug and all the beautiful people who put together MARVEL PREVIEW #22, *MERLIN*.

After reading it I just had to write and tell you how magnificent it really was. John Buscema is one of my favorite artists and Camelot one of my best loved tales. Special Exceptions to Earl Norem for a stunning cover. I am looking forward to seeing more of Merlin and the Great King Arthur. Also my impression of the "Views of King Arthur" by Bill Mantlo and Steven Grant is that they were enlightening and perfect.

I am an avid reader/fan of Conan, and I fully appreciate a comic that is not only artfully expressed, but intelligent, also.

Thanks again.

Lisa Harvilla
Kenilworth, NJ

Friends,

What did I think of MARVEL PREVIEW #22, *MERLIN*? Boring, poorly drawn, and a miserable piece of work!

And if you believe THAT, I have some swampland I'd like to sell you.

Seriously, this was the BEST work of Mr. Buscema. It surpasses even his work on Conan. Anybody could see it was a labor of love. I have John's *The Art of John Buscema*, containing his rendition of a knight, so I was hoping to see such a story sometime.

If this series doesn't get its own book I, for one, will be very disappointed. Anybody else feel that way?

If all the comic mags I have disappeared tomorrow, this is the one I'd miss the most.

Mark Carter
94½ Dorothy Street
Welland, Ontario
Canada L3B 3V9

Dear Marvel,

When and if Jim Steranko chronicles the Marvel Age of Comics in his fine *History of Comics* series, there will undoubtedly be an entire chaper devoted to the awesome artistic abilities of John Buscema.

Over the years, John has not only drawn every character in the Marvel Universe, but he has drawn them *well*. Indeed, he has set a standard of consistent graphic excellence for the entire industry to follow.

Nor can he be accused of lack of innovation. He has never been afraid to experiment or try some new technique. This has resulted in the likes of the Weirdworld Trilogy, and MARVEL PREVIEW #22, which featured Merlin, King Arthur, and the Knights of the Round Table.

The latter was one of the most interesting things that Marvel has ever done. To me, this time period is every bit as enchanting and exciting as the Hyborian Age of Conan, and thanks to John, we've been given a glorious glimpse of it. This superb story is representative of his versatile talent, and I can't wait to see what he does next.

Kevin C. McConnell
118 Main Avenue
Warren, PA 16365

Dear People,

The Merlin story was fantastic -- the best work of art done by Mr. Buscema in a long time. I'm glad to see Buscema do other kinds of work (besides barbarians). If Merlin ever returns, how about using Stan Lee's original Black Knight side-by-side with the Old Mystic? For future stories, how about three or four science fiction tales with Killraven, Monark, Guardians of the Galaxy and Seekers 3000, (etc., etc., etc.)

Peter Garcia
Box 711 Hatillo
Puerto Rico 00659

Hi, Peter. I'm glad you enjoyed *MERLIN*, but the main reason I'm printing your letter is to enjoy the opportunity of letting you and the other readers of MARVEL PREVIEW know how I conceive this magazine. *MARVEL PREVIEW is an opportunity to try new stories, new characters, and new concepts.* For that reason, so long as I'm editing this book you'll get such far-out offerings as BIZARRE ADVENTURES and PARADOX. The only exception to the "new" rule is if there is an exceptional character that has never quite come into his/her own. In this case, if we have a new way to present this character, and can get a terrific writer/artist team together, we'll use already established characters.

LYNN

Dear Lynn,

Just wanted to say I have just finished reading *MERLIN* (MARVEL PREVIEW #22). The artwork was wonderful, the story was exciting, and it was an all 'round enjoyable reading. I am 33-years-old and have been reading and collecting Marvels for some time but would like to see some large magazines of the *John Carter, Warlord Of Mars* series. It is no longer available in Oklahoma City. I also wish that if you folks are going to drop a magazine or book that you would put out a final edtion.

Walter L. Steele
P.O. Box 94754
Oklahoma City, OK 73143

Dear People,

I have long been an admirer of John Buscema's work -- he is, I think, one of the five best in the business -- so I could only admire MARVEL PREVIEW #22. John's Camelot soared and, though I think he made his Arthur look a little too old, the characters suited their parts.

Doug Moench's story was good (though it was no surprise who Behar -- Belial? -- and his father were). The best part of the story were the characterizations. Merlin's, of course, was the best of the lot -- not just a conjurer but a true sorcerer, not a scheming power-behind-the-throne, but a loyal advisor, a scientist/philosopher who knows that while sorcery -- good and bad -- may exist, much of man's mythological menagerie is just that - mythology. Here's to Merlin!

One final word: I hope I read that notice on the back cover of PREVIEW #22 wrong. I hope DRACULA #6 won't be the *last* issue of a good magazine.

'Till Satana does endorsements for lipstick.

Make mine Marvel!

Gary Herring
5724 Jones Valley Drive
Huntsville, AL 35802

Thank you for your compliments, Gary. I'm sorry to tell you that THE TOMB OF DRACULA is indeed defunct. Kaput. The bright light on the horizon is that there will be a MARVEL PREVIEW horror issue featuring the classic Lord of the Undead. (Find out the details in this issue's SNEAK PREVIEW.)

Okay. Sharpen the quills and let us know what you think of PARADOX by writing to:

PREVIEW REVIEW
MARVEL MAGAZINE GROUP
575 MADISON AVENUE
New York, N.Y. 10022

PREVIEW REVIEW

Hello, and welcome to another issue of MARVEL PREVIEW. This issue's letter column deals with *MERLIN* (MARVEL PREVIEW #22) by Doug Moench and John Buscema, cover by Earl Norem. *MERLIN* had already been in the works for many months when I first joined Marvel in August of '79. Big John had wanted to do something with the Knights of the Round Table, King Arthur, and, most especially, the fascinating character of Merlin. Rick Marschall, then editor of the magazine, is therefore responsible for this excellent issue. I'll take credit for commissioning the two articles on the historical King Arthur and for choosing the cover. *MERLIN* was Rick's last MARVEL PREVIEW and I think you'll probably agree with me that he can be very proud of this "swan song." In fact, I *know* you agree with me! Read on!

LYNN GRAEME

Jim, Lynn, and *especially* Mr.'s Buscema, Moench, and Costanza--

I just finished *MERLIN* and I'm in Heaven! It was a masterpiece -- being a self-proclaimed freak on Arthurian legend, I've seen a lot of work -- but none half as fine as this PREVIEW issue! PLEASE keep it going... and, to make it even better, let's put a little more LANCELOT in there! (He's my idol!)

Thanks, fellas... and Long Live King Arthur!

Linda Romano
100 Peterson Place
Lynbrook, NY 11563

Dear John and Doug:

Yesterday, I walked into my local book shop, looked on the magazine shelf and what did I see? MARVEL PREVIEW *Presents MERLIN*, a saga of epic beauty, and by John Buscema and Doug Monech.

Instantly, I snatched it up and ran to the check-out counter. Having seen Big John's work on *The Warriors of the Shadow Realm*, I knew I wouldn't be disappointed and I wasn't! This issue of MARVEL PREVIEW was excellent. It is all I've been waiting for Marvel to do since I heard of John Buscema's interest in *Prince Valiant*. It was worth the wait with some special treats: John Buscema's name under the story credits.

Tom Palmer and John Tartaglione did a terrific job. The lettering was beautifully done by John Costanza, and last but not least the excellent cover by Earl Norem.

By the cauldrons of Merlin, this book is loaded with surprises! The idea of Marvel experimenting with different types of characters and formats has been pleasing to me but this tops all that has gone before.

The features on "The Ages Of Arthur" and "Looking For The Real Arthur" added some interesting background on the story. It made the book somewhat educational. Since John is so interesting and interested in this type of thing, I would like to know if he would want to do more stories with the same type of characters such as Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, etc.

I think it may be interesting, don't you? This issue is so well done I can't compare it and put into words what I feel. Before I go to more comments, if I may, on the Sneak Preview page, second sentence, first paragraph, Lynn Graeme quotes, "This is an all-new version of the PREVIEW #21. Unless my memory fails, wasn't it #20? **((Yep! Lynn))**

Besides John Buscema's art I also like the talents of Gil Kane. Is there anything planned for this hero, *Blackmark* in the future? I enjoyed the book.

Well, that's all... and thank you for an only-too-short trip to Camelot. Excellent, Just Great, Ideal, Enjoyable, Etc., Etc.

Frank A. Zippay Jr.
30 Flora Drive
Bedford, OH 44146

Frank, a no-prize should be winging its way toward you at this very moment: yes, BIZARRE ADVENTURES *was* issue #20. As for Gil Kane... I have a dream in which Stan Lee and Gil Kane do an issue of MARVEL PREVIEW starring The Silver Surfer and am currently working with Ed-in-Chief Jim Shooter to make my dream come true. Mr. Kane is also working on a Hulk story for THE HULK magazine.

LYNN

Dear Sirs,

I wish to congratulate you on your beautiful magazines. I have only seen three issues of MARVEL PREVIEW and I bought all three. Issue #20 was pretty good. The cover was superb, and what was inside wasn't bad either. Howard Chaykin (Hey! I spelled that right without looking!) did a good job on the Dominic Fortune stories, and "War Toy" was the best thing in the book. "Good Lord" was good, but having god in the form of a monster was dumb.

Issue #21 was good. I think Marvel should give Moon Knight his own magazine.**((We did -- see below. Lynn))**

Now on to issue #22. "The Quest of the King" was the best story I've seen in MARVEL PREVIEW yet. John Buscema did a superb job on the drawing, and Doug Moench and Buscema did a fabulous job on the story.

Keep up the good work.

Troy Hayes
7702 Brewer Drive
Louisville, KY 40258

Moon Knight now has his own color comic, edited by Dennis O'Neil and Mark Gruenwald, and available for a mere fifty cents wherever comic books are sold. Hey -- we know a winner when we see it!

LYNN

Dear Doug and John,

MERLIN was the finest story I have seen in Marvel's black and whites for quite some time. That includes THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN book. I have gotten bored with (Buscema's) art inked by the sketchy tones of DeZuniga and Nebres. Palmer's inks with Buscema's pencils brought back memories of the issues that Buscema and Palmer did on THE AVENGERS.

John, your storytelling always impresses me. The story had an excellent flow to it and an interesting ending. I liked your little tribute to Foster's Valiant, having Beliar fight the dragon. I remember Roy Thomas writing that this was one of his favorite sequences.

I want to say that it was good to see John Buscema set free on a character other than Conan. I will treasure that story and only wish that we could see more of them, especially if Tom Palmer can ink them. Congrats to John Tartaglione... I could not pinpoint his work on the strip... (his) work blended in with Palmer very well.

Doug, you provided fine dialogue, nothing overwritten. And, lastly, to John Costanza, congratulations on the lettering. The extra time to provide the special letters is appreciated. Thank you for a wonderful story. How about a sequel?

Donald Poole
6 North 4th Street
Martin's Ferry, OH 43935

A sequel is not impossible -- what do you say, John and Doug? Ready to weave another enchantment?

LYNN

Dear Folk,

As a long-time comics fan who is also burdened by a passion for British history, I was very pleased with your *MERLIN* issue of MARVEL PREVIEW. The Arthurian legends appeal to me especially, because it's one of the few instances in an academic life in which one can get away with devoting intense study to fantasy (the classical myths being another, and, recently, the works of Tolkien).

Even so, I must, right off the bat, revive the old letterback tradition of pointing out errors (though I'll do you the favor of not demanding a no-prize, even though this place

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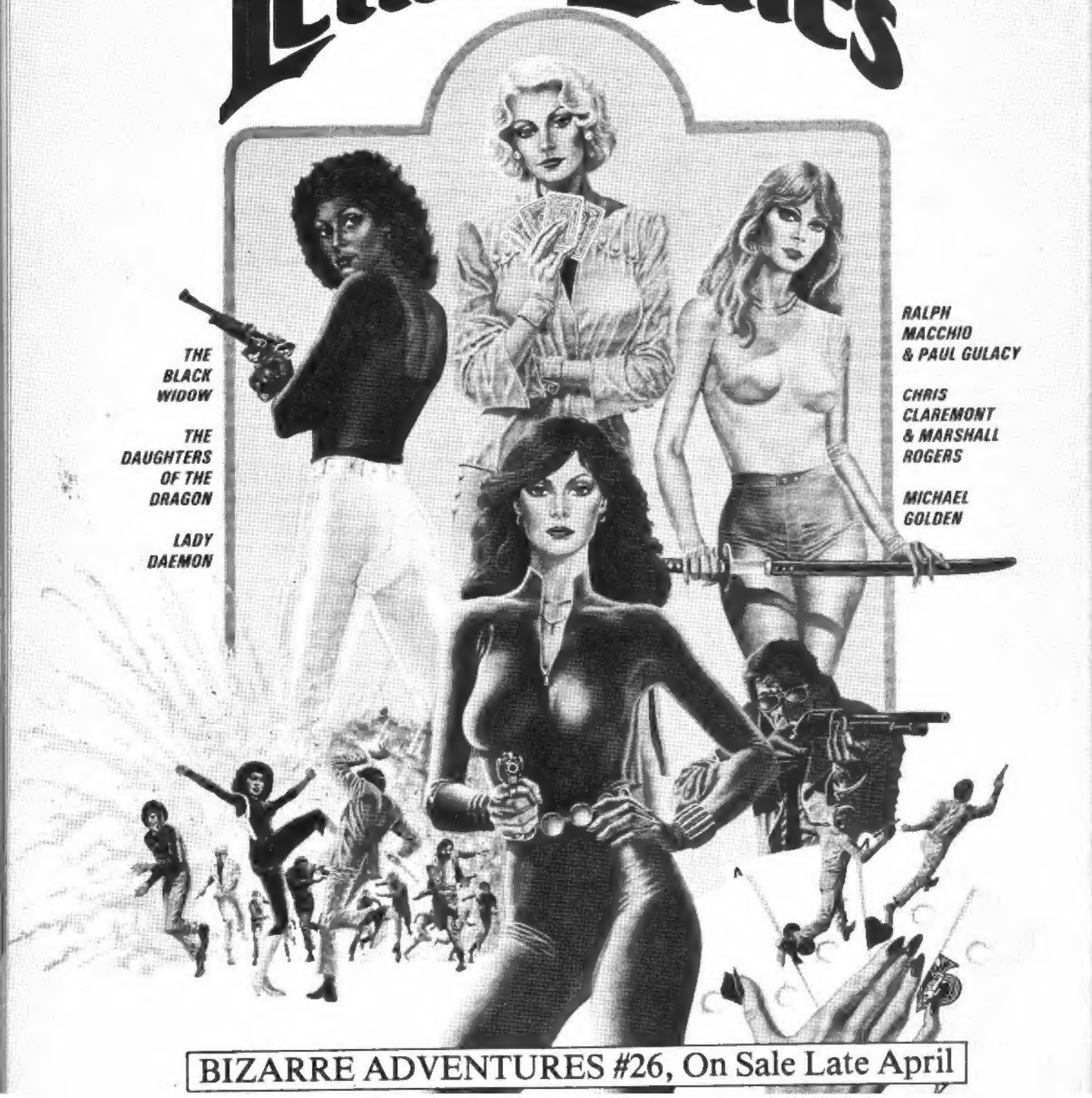

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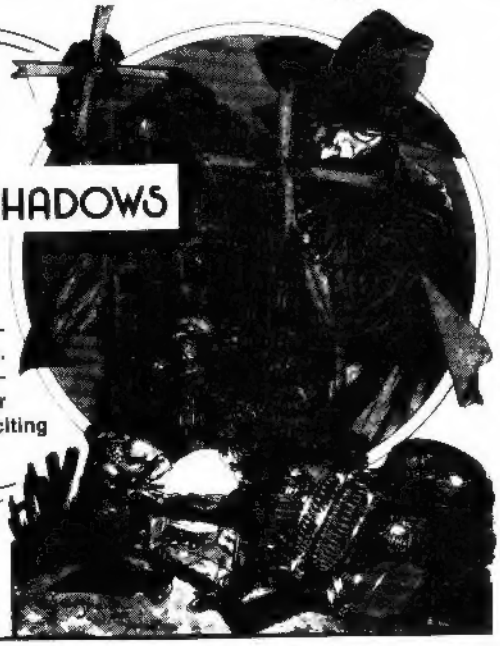

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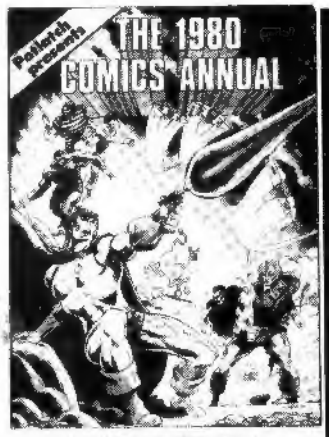

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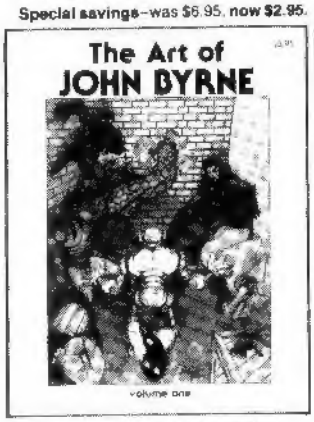

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